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READERS ARE INVITED TO COMMENT

ON ARTICLES IN ***NHQ***

WITH A VIEW

TO PUBLICATION AS LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NHQ, P.O.BOX 3, BUDAPEST 1426, HUNGARY

Péter Hanák

Central Europe: An Alternative to Disintegration

If somebody ever comes to write the history of the Central Europe concept, it is to be hoped that they will not ignore the fluorescent property of this errant idea, which allowed it to fade in daylight, and glow in the dark. It was frustrated during the glorious days of the 1918, 1945 and 1989 liberations; it was rekindled during the dark years of the fascist dictatorship and during the communist régime. This fluorescence even penetrated the leaden walls of the Stalinist era. Its occasional flare-ups led to the positive re-evaluation of the Habsburg years and the old label of "the prison of nations" to be removed; in a world which had experienced Auschwitz and the Gulag, the old Empire seemed like a state prison at most, whose inmates cheerfully played cards with their gaolers, after eating their goulash and drinking their pint of beer.

The idea took a more distinct shape with the emergence of political and cultural aspects. In the debate over Central Europe, the exploration of deep layers of history was complicated by the acrobatics of terminology, many conceptual misunderstandings, the abstract nature of the philosophy of history, and a forced political timeliness. However, this debate on Central Europe as a particular and independent region was useful in two respects: it provided historians with an incentive to study new topics, and the public to get ready for new historical formations. Timothy Garton Ash has pointed out that there is no proper research into the present situation of Central Europe and on the problems of its democratic transformation; if there was, it was done too late. However, the intellectuals of the region were not completely unprepared for the momentous changes at the end of the 1980s.

What could be foreseen

The run of failures suffered by Gorbachev's *perestroika* in the second half of the 80s made the possibility that was vague and distant in 1956, in 1968 and even in 1981, an absolute certainty. The disintegration of the Empire was

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on the way. As an economy, the Soviet block was a disaster, and the gaps in its political structure had become so wide that it was impossible to bridge them with any kind of ideology. Under the effect of glasnost, the block—especially its western "provinces"—inevitably started to crumble. Politicians, intellectuals and the press largely believed that a slow and gradual transformation, a sort of modern variant of "finlandization" will take place in the region.

The reason why economists, social scientists and historians predicted slow change was that they saw, more or less, the potential difficulties in this modern "restoration". There were three factors which made optimistic prognosis very probable. First of all, there was the loudly declared—increasingly evident—interest of the West in the liberation of the Central European countries, conquered after the Second World War; second, there was a strong faith in the power of Reason, that is, in the therapeutic side-effects of the oppression, terror and destruction suffered during fascism and communism; finally, there was the largely anticommunist nature of the —masked or suppressed—nationalism of the small nations of the region, which bore a striking resemblance to the past democratic fight for freedom, one which was likely to confuse.

These three factors were so closely connected that they drew upon each other to provide belief in, and argument for, a forecast that development would prove rational. In the light of these arguments, some form of integration of the Central European countries—in particular, Austria and Hungary along with Czecho-Slovakia and Poland, which share much the same past—seemed fairly probable. Or, at least, it seemed probable to an extent that was enough to give body and soul to the revived idea of Central Europe.

What could not be foreseen

As against certain soothsayers, benefitting from hindsight, I can clearly state that the rapid and turbulent disintegration of the Soviet Union, with all its conflicts, and the liquidation of Yugoslavia, sealed by a barbarous civil war, were not predictable, given the present forecasting capability of the social sciences. The above mentioned three factors probably had a large role in this lack of awareness. The unexpectedly rapid collapse of the Soviet Union soon dampened the liberating enthusiasm of Western opinion, as did the vehemence of the East-Central European nations' anticommunist ardour. The liberating energy of patriotism was transformed into the nourishment of nationalism and it took merely a few weeks to realize that anticommunism is not necessarily democracy, indeed, that in several countries, state-nationalism is the new shape of communism.

It became clear very soon that the economic situation of the countries of the block is disastrous; that the transition to a market economy is much more complicated and protracted than expected, and that, in the process of forming "classless" societies, these countries had regressed to quasi-precapitalist conditions—to becoming marginal of the Western market economies. The

realization of all this rapidly cooled down the friendship felt for freshly liberated small Central and Eastern European nations. This new—not the first and certainly not the last—failure of a rationalist prophecy induced general disillusion. Well, well, Western circles said, Central Europe is a phantom idea, conceived out of nostalgia.

And if this region, so full of weaponry and hatred and threatening to export its chaos to our West, still insists on existing, it's definiely not worth our support: it ought to be sent back to the East where it belongs, or at least, to some sort of limbo on our borders.

A commentary on the Hobsbawm debate

Recent issues of *Lettre International* have published a discussion between Eric Hobsbawm and myself on whether or not Central Europe exists. There are only two questions of importance in which our opinions differ. Hobsbawm persists in his view of Central Europe as an essentially racist notion. He argues that the nations of this region despise each other, and especially their neighbours to the East. No doubt there is a grain of truth in this, the only counterargument could be to ask whether this same prejudice is not true of the English, the French, the Germans, and the Swiss? Is Western Europe in its entirety free of any kind of racism? My point in putting these questions is not to deny that there is a false belief in superiority in Central Europe, wax and wane though it may at different times. What I would deny is that it is typical of those who support the notion of a Central Europe, rather than of conservative nationalists, of those populists who are anything but supporters of the idea of Central European reconciliation and integration. Perhaps—seen from London—our region looks too dark now. I hope that we can agree that an idea and those who persist in believing in it should not be condemned because of existing—though not prevalent—racism.

Hobsbawm, like many others in the West, rightly observes that the Central Europe concept has been discredited once again. He is probably right that the nations of the region do not orientate themselves towards Vienna—let alone Budapest—but towards Brussels. But even if that is true, we haven't answered the whys simply by this statement of fact. Why did Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union break up with such amazing speed? Merely as a result of venomous nationalism? Will the European Community accept even the more peaceful ones as members? And if the new Iron Curtain is lifted, will the internal problems and conflicts of Central and Eastern Europe sort themselves out? Last but not least, what can be the cause of this new failure of the Central Europe concept? Was it perhaps no more than phantasmagoria after all?

There are all kinds of answers to this question. I'd like to argue that historically, the essential conditions for integration were always absent and are still absent in Central Europe.

Essentials for integration

Economic conditions. Economic relations of the region are characterized by the lack of mobility of the factors of production and by the failure of complementary specialization. Both failures derive from the former planned economy and from the compulsive character of the "mutual aid" seven badly-functioning planned economies provided each other; in fact, from the disfunctionality of the whole communist economic cooperation.

Social conditions. In the countries of the region, a civic society either did not exist or was very weak, mainly because of the absence or weakness of the middle class and its backbone, the independent entrepreneur, the autonomous individual. In this respect, the decline of the aristocracy and of the gentry created a broader basis—which would not be taken advantage of, given the conditions of communism, by a rising modern bourgeois middle class.

Political conditions. Ever since 1918, small sovereign states have consolidated themselves in the region. The institutional frames and the awareness of sovereignty have become so strong that even to set partial limits on them—which is an essential condition for joining any kind of integration, including the European Comunity—seems unacceptable to the majority of the population. In several countries, such as Serbia, Rumania and Slovakia, the 19th century notion of the national state, assimilating and homogenizing minorities, flourishes. This notion is strongly opposed to the autonomy of national and religious minorities and the legitimacy of collective rights of the minorities, which is an endless cause of continuous internal conflicts and of international tension; it is thus an obstacle to even loose forms of integration.

Intellectual conditions. During this century of ours, the consciousness of either European or Central European community did not take root in our region. In this respect, the situation is worse than it was at the beginning of the century when—existing alongside strong national consciousness—some loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty or to the Empire was alive among a fairly large number of Austrians, Czechs, Hungarians, Slovaks and Croatians. The socialist experiment of trying to impose a new consciousness which transcends nation-centred education was totally unsuccessful—presumably because of the nationalist-imperialist reality that hid behind the phraseology. Tolerance of twin loyalties is non-existent, a common, humanist-centred civic education does not exist. To begin with ourselves in Hungary, our self-seclusion from our neighbours is very marked and the ideas and slogans of inter-war nationalism have certainly not disappeared.

If today in Hungary conservative and populist nationalism does not have the strength—and especially not the political power—that it has in those of our neighbours mentioned above, the reasons are that the treatment of national and religious minorities and tolerance towards them is here more effective and much closer to the European standard, and that Hungary has come further along the path of developing a civic society than her neighbours have. Hungary has consolidated herself more, even from the ideological point of view, than

disintegrating Yugoslavia, or Rumania, still struggling with a one-party and one-nation dictatorship, or Slovakia.

The war being fought in the region, delays in democratically settling minority poblems and the region's sea of troubles would make seem hopelessly utopian the belief that the nations here will ever be reconciled with each other, or that the conditions for an integration, freely agreed on, will ever be created in the minds of the people of the region. A realistic politician or financier who would base the foreign relations of a country, or the strategy of a bank, on the Central Europe concept is unlikely to be found at the moment. Indeed, realpolitik is always based on the consideration of current probabilities and the balance of power of the moment, and not on long-term historical processes and alternatives that involve so many factors. Is the decline of Central Europe so much an accomplished fact, is Central Europe really dead and buried, are the funeral orations really justified from the historical point of view?

Assets in the balance sheet of the Central Europe concept

The balance-sheet shown by Central Europe projects is loaded with massive debits; they do, however, have some assets too. First, there is the fact that the concept itself has come closer to being a viable option. There have been plans for Central Europe for a century and a half now; what is immediately striking of those made in the turbulent period betwen 1848 and 1867 is that most were purely utopian, produced by leaders without power. In the first half of our century, the historical urge behind, and the rationality of plans for, federation increased, but their realism did not: those who drew up the plans were trying to apply ideals to small, nationalist states which stoutly resisted this rational "irrealpolitik". In the 1980s, however, cooperation between the Czech Charta, the Polish Solidarnost and the Hungarian democratic opposition, and later, the summits in Visegrád in Hungary, showed the necessity for cooperation, and in so doing, increased the social and political basis for cooperation.

Second, the international situation has changed considerably, especially as compared with 1919. The settling of accounts after the Great War was mainly determined by the anti-German and anti-Soviet sentiments of the victorious allied powers. Under the spell of the national state as a protective dam, the Great Powers and their East-Central European allies rejected any form of integration. However, defeats and tragedies between and after the two wars taught the Western powers a painful lesson about the destabilizing quality of small Central European states. Today the West, as it works on its own integration, shows a definitely pro-integration attitude towards both the former Soviet empire and the newly liberated small states. On the other hand, the European Community is a factor outside our region and, however great its financial and political influence, it apparently does not wish to repeat either the 19th century Vienna measures, or Hitler's Vienna dictates.

Third, all this adds up to the fact that, in the present situation, Central Europe cannot expect any kind of arrangement forged in Moscow, Paris or Berlin. Either Central Europe manages to deal with its internal conflicts and creates the conditions for regional integration—alone, but in close interaction with the Western process—or it will disintegrate and immerse itself in its own domestic quarrels.

Alternating integration and disintegration in Europe

Before examining this gloomy heading, we should pause briefly to consider whether there is any regularity in the historical oscillation of integration and disintegration.

It is typical of our continent's historical development that, when social changes and experience reach their culmination point, they break up the old society and state. The collapse of the Roman Empire was followed by a new structure and complete political disunity, and then by the rise of small Christian kingdoms. It took several centuries to create another empire, the Carolingian, which was followed by the Holy Roman Empire. At the dawn of the modern era, the disintegration of that empire into national states began from new foundations. This process culminated in the 19th century and reached Central Europe, but did not dissolve the three multinational, dynastic states in the East. However, after 1918, only one of them survived, the Soviet Union, which, in spite of, or because of, radical social changes basically preserved the framework of the Russian Empire.

The process does not seem to have come to an end under the tremendous pressure of communist dictatorship: bit by bit, the national concept chipped away at the Soviet monster with feet of clay. National disintegration has reached its culmination point in our days; not only on the ruins of the Soviet empire, the point has also been reached in the multi-national successor states to the Habsburg Empire. The dramatic events of these days make it obvious that both the Soviet edifice and the Yugoslav federal system were hasty and premature experiments, since they stifled the euphoria of small state sovereignty before these states could mature, let alone overripen. They constructed modern imperial integrations for which the conditions were not mature in 1918, nor after 1945, nor even in our own days.

Thus, the disintegration that is now taking place in the central and eastern regions of Europe is the termination, a necessary climax even, to a century-old historical process. That is, according to Hegelian logic, we are confronted with a classical example of teleological necessity. However, history is irreverent enough to mock the logic of heathen and true prophets alike. In history, there is no absolute necessity, only contingencies. The present disintegration of Central and Eastern Europe reveals two tendencies. So it is legitimate to ask what will come after the sovereignty of Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, the Baltic, and all the other independent states is recognized and realized. Will new tiny national states be imposed on these multi-national regions, a cult of self-contained

nations flourish, the miniaturization of *Kleinstaaterei* continue? Or will these small independent states move towards a free agreement on the basis of equality and the recognition of the rights of minorities, and in this way, lay the foundations of a regional integration? As I have argued, if the first is what will happen, the decline and deterioration of our region is inevitable. If the second, Central Europe itself can lay the foundations for its own integration and thereby create the solid conditions for the great step, the integration to Europe.

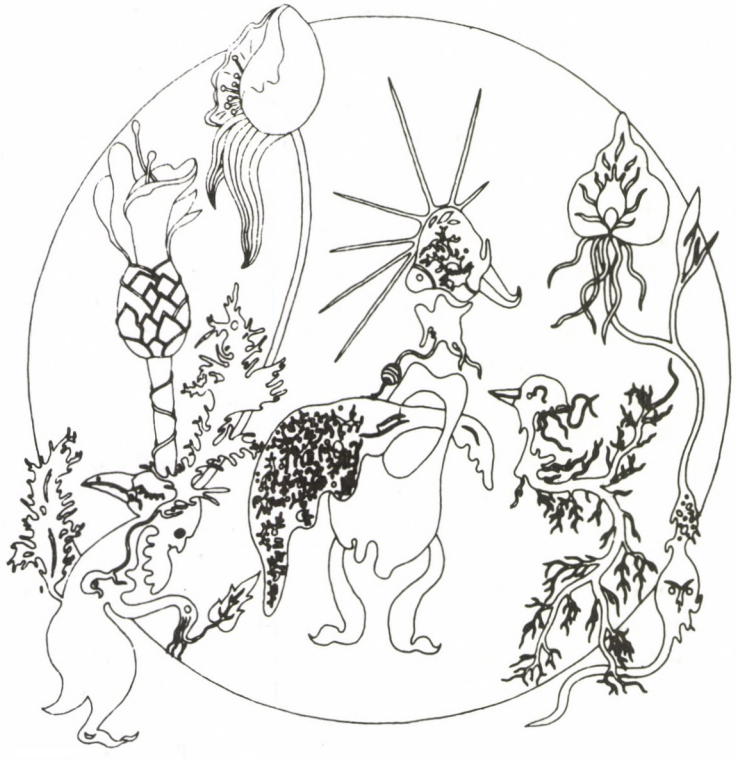
Life and theory

The oft quoted tag from Goethe's *Faust* was not just confirmed, but even amended by history. In our century, it turned out that theory is not only grey, but sometimes even bloody; and the tree of life is not made of gold, but of the grey everyday life of ordinary people. The weakness of the Central Europe concept did not lie in the fact that those who planned for it held an initial idea (since without such the whole notion would not have been born), but in the fact that they were reckoning on ideal and not typical situations, ideal, not typical governments; they did not really take the public opinion in the various countries into consideration, but trusted completely in the omnipotence of rational comprehension. However, even the most meticulously measured ethnic borders, even the absolute separation of the authority of central and local government would not have convinced national governments, jealous of their sovereignty, and nations brought up to distrust their neighbours, of the salutary effect of any plan made by a Renner, a Jászi, a Masaryk, or a Hodza.

Today, Central Europe does not need a confederation plan, but rather a new Marshall plan. It is in crying need for concessions rather than conceptions. Obviously, economic aid, favourable capital investment and free markets are essential in this present critical situation. Markets, loans, management training, along with a free flow of capital and technology, are necessary but not essential conditions for the economic recovery of the region and the restoration of the political and mental equilibrium. The region is in urgent need of the political and intellectual factors of coexistence, that is, a whole series of small, pragmatic steps. A total rearrangement is needed, however large the obstacles: immigration and employment, customs and, especially, trade regulations among the countries of the region. The position of national and religious minorities in the region must be settled in a new way, through a process of international and bilateral talks, with rational compromises offered and made. Cultural policy should be reconsidered from the regional point of view. A common basis must be found to teach national subjects. A more intensive teaching of the languages of the region, common schools, common educational forms and institutions are needed. What I have in mind is not education of the German or Slovak minority in Hungary in Hungarian, or the education of Hungarians in Rumania in Rumanian. These state-imposed solutions have increased rather than eased tensions. It is in summer courses, in comparative courses of European and

Central European culture that we should teach a common tongue: the understanding of each other's past, of each other's culture, and of each other's current problems.

The idea of small, pragmatic steps is more than just the politics of the day: it is a viable method of understanding. The success of this pragmatism depends on two important conditions. First, we must accept that our region is a multinational one, with mixed populations in numerous places. The only ways to attain peace here are either through agreement or by liquidating one another. If we exclude genocide as a solution, then the starting-point is to accept the coexistence of nations and to make rational compromises based on this acceptance. The other condition, which is also based on accepting this historical situation, is the tolerance of double or multiple loyalty. At last we should realize and accept that state and nation, civic loyalty and national culture are not necessarily identical, but are certainly not contradictory realities. If the leaders of our region's countries accept this, then they will succeed in taking pragmatic steps towards agreement and integration. This is not the place to describe the consequences of the "if they don't" option. But we should not forget that there is such an alternative. For today, Central Europe is neither a reality, nor an utopia—it is an alternative option.



George Szirtes

Two Poems

New Grass

A man has gone grey within one hour.
There he was standing at the bus stop,
When time grabbed him by the collar, hoicked
Him up a few storeys then let him drop.

It's in the falling, the great fallings
That time produces, the sudden wave,
Of the hand in the cloud, the blow
That fills the morgue and the mass grave
Then throws on cold earth and grows new grass
As though nothing had happened, that blows grey
On the head through the ears and the eyes,
As it does on any Tuesday or Wednesday.

I sat in the country and watched time passing over.
It farted and snored and blackened the window pane.
Old men blew about like flies and children screamed
In the gust under great haymakers of rain.

With whom does time gallop withal? With whom
Does it hang heavy? Who tiptoes across the field
In the flickering light, over soft grass
But lately healed?

George Szirtes's *latest volume of poems*, Bridge Passages, *was published by Oxford University Press in 1991. See also his essays, book reviews and translations from Hungarian poetry in recent issues of* NHQ.

Eat Good Bread Dear Father[1]

Every lunchtime they'd leave you a piece of *mignon.*
Now I can imagine the white of the paper bag
And the small yellow doily under the plate
In the afternoon half-dark. And I drag
From my memory not your room but mine
(Or any room that seems to be half-dark)
To construct a world we may meet in. Here is the door
To the kitchen, here is the sideboard, the mark
On the tablecloth and the print of my thumb
On the page. Here nothing is known, everything dissolves
To noise or to music (but what is the difference?)
A music which says (so must mean) things, that solves
The pathos of cake on a saucer or the tiny
Cosmic hum that rings an old woman's hand
As she moves in the kitchen like a conductor,
Waving her notes into place, weaving the slender
Sound of paper and footstep. We start as with lines
On a score, the mignon a radiance among other radiances,
With your blank childhood face and the space between lines,
Your voices, our distances.

[1] *A mnemonic used by music teachers to help the pupils remember the lines in a music score—Eat Good Bread Dear Father.*

Ákos Szilágyi

Comradely Kisses

A Cogitation

One anomaly missed by all of the countless post mortems on the erstwhile Soviet Block is what we might term "official osculation" or, more simply, "the comradely kiss". And yet, the *osculum secretarii generalis,* a political gesture smacking—literally—of Byzantine Orthodox ritual is, I contend, the key to much that continues to baffle Kremlin watchers to this day.

There was a time, of course, when comrades did not kiss. The early Bolsheviks did not need Pravoslav symbolism to demonstrate their unity, and shunned using the Russian Orthodox form of greeting and farewell: three kisses—in effect, the Orthodox sign of the cross, and of the oneness of the Trinity. The young Bolshevik revolutionaries, committed to doing away with the illusions attached to ecclesiastical ceremony, hierarchy and power once and for all, had no use for the Pravoslav ritual kiss: a brotherly hug, or a firm handshake was much more their style. Repudiating kissing and kisses was, clearly, a political stand against czarist autocracy, a separation of kiss and state, so to speak, that followed logically from their ultra-rationalism and modernity. No doubt about it: the kiss is where the Bolshevik and the liberal lines irrevocably meet.

For kisses to make a public comeback from the private sphere to which they were banished, the new post-revolutionary generation of Bolsheviks had to renounce barren rationalism, and reinterpret the new ideology in religious terms. Moscow had again to become the "Third Rome", a pseudo-medieval theocracy of sorts, with communism taking the place of Christianity as the state religion, the Party taking the Church's place, apparatchiks taking the priests's and the Leader—the State—taking God's. The medievalesque trappings of the Stalinist state ranged from "people's banquets" held in the Kremlin, the new imperial court, to Stalin's reorganizing the Party along the lines of a latter-day order of knighthood, heraldry and all.

Stalin's apotheosis and state appropriation of Christian symbolism notwithstanding, however, we shall find no trace of ritual kissing in he public forums of the sacral Stalinist state. Stalin would no sooner kiss the most loyal of his supporters than he would have thought of kissing Lenin. The ritual Party-Statist Kiss came into vogue only after his passing, in the twilight decades of

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the Soviet quasi-theocracy, with the kisses exchanged by the Party leaders becoming the more smacking and the more frequent the closer the system came to breathing its last. The comradely kiss was introduced by Khrushchev, and it is tempting—though patently simplistic—to account for the innovation in terms of his anti-Stalinism: since Stalin had not been the kissing kind, he, Khrushchev, would be, and would launch a kiss-of-peace offensive against Stalinists within the Party and against cold warriors in the West. But why had Stalin been loath to kiss?

A number of answers come to mind. In the first place, there is a point of self-adulation at which there is only one set of lips worthy of touching one: one's own. Naturally, we have no way of knowing whether Stalin ever thought of giving himself a kiss—an image captured by the poet Endre Ady: "The kisses I give are like a God kissing. It is myself I kiss". We do know, however, that for a god, no lesser kiss will do.

Then, of course, there is the matter of Stalin's origin: a son of the Caucasus, his was a world of rough and remote he-men. He had nothing but contempt for what he saw as Slavic sentimentalism and the intimacies of sycophants, to say nothing of the revulsion he felt for all physical contact as his paranoia progressed. Stalin, the State-God who provided for and punished, was omniscient and omnipotent, could not afford the luxury of tender moments. (Even Lenin had been careful to steer clear of these. Listen to Beethoven's *Appassionata* at a time when the task at hand was to "hit people over the head, again and again"? No way!) Stalin, for his part, took pride in the roughness of his nature, in his "Bolshevik harshness", defiantly mocking the characterization Lenin gave of him in his last will and testament. "Yes, comrades, I am rough on those comrades who brutally and treacherously rend and destroy the Party. I make no secret of this, and never have." As time went on, he became more and more the angry, avenging and victorious State-God, cultivating attributes that invariably bring Christ and Pantocrator icons to mind.

The final point about Stalin and kisses is that their very juxtaposition is a category mistake. The fact is that every kiss assumes the existence of at least a two-member set. For a kiss to take place, you need two entities located some distance from one another in real space. God and His creation, however, are all one. By analogy, all of Stalin's political following, the entire Soviet people, were comprehended in Stalin qua State-God. Consequently, the prime condition of a kiss simply did not obtain. It might make matters clearer to think of a dragon: it will not set to smooching with itself despite having a dozen heads.

Inaccessible as Stalin was to kisses in his person, he would have been available for kissing as an icon. But though Stalin icons—more precisely, retouched photos of him—were to be found in every home and every Party building, there is no indication that they were ever kissed, at least not publicly. Pray one could to them, as to the Pravoslav icons, but kissing them was not encouraged. Nor do we know of the boot of any Stalin statue being worn away under reverent kisses, like the right toe of the statue of St Peter in St Peter's in Rome.

There is a conspicuous lack of erotic kisses in the movies made in the Stalin years, and of state-religious kisses as well. There were, however, alternate, acceptable ways of expressing much the same sentiment. At the conclusion of *The Fall of Berlin,* for instance, the heroine approaches Stalin the Saviour just come down from the sky, and asks if she might kiss him. Permission granted, the girl lets go of the hand of her Worker-Soldier-Boy sweetheart, and, acting for all the assembled throng, touches her face to Stalin's shoulder—in keeping with ancient Georgian custom, as the cognoscenti will know. In the last scene of *The Pledge,* however, it is Stalin himself who kisses the hand of the Russian Mother, thanking her, with this chivalrous gesture, for the sacrifice she has made on the altar of Victory. Not even Stalinist film makers could violate the golden rule of movie making: All's well that ends with a kiss. And better a statist kiss than no kiss at all. It was a real kiss, however, that movie goers saw Stalin bestow on the sword Churchill gave him for his birthday towards the end of the war. And newsreel after newsreel showed soldiers kissing the flag on their way to the front. The new vogue of kisses clearly had a lot to do with the mobilization of the Pravoslav Church as part of the war effort, and the campaign of Russianization that was to peak just after the war.

Not even the Stalinist state, as we have seen, could do without kisses. But I would go further than that. If we consider that enunciating the name of God is a kind of spiritual kiss, one representing an even more intimate form of contact for the faithful than kissing an icon, we shall see that kisses—in this broader sense—formed the very cornerstone of the Stalinist state religion. As enunciating God's name is at the heart of the Christian's call for a strength that transcends his own, so in Stalin's days his name was a name above all names, a source of strength and of legitimacy, and one pronounced millions of times a day. Kisses in this metaphorical sense were part of what sustained the Stalinist quasi-theocracy.

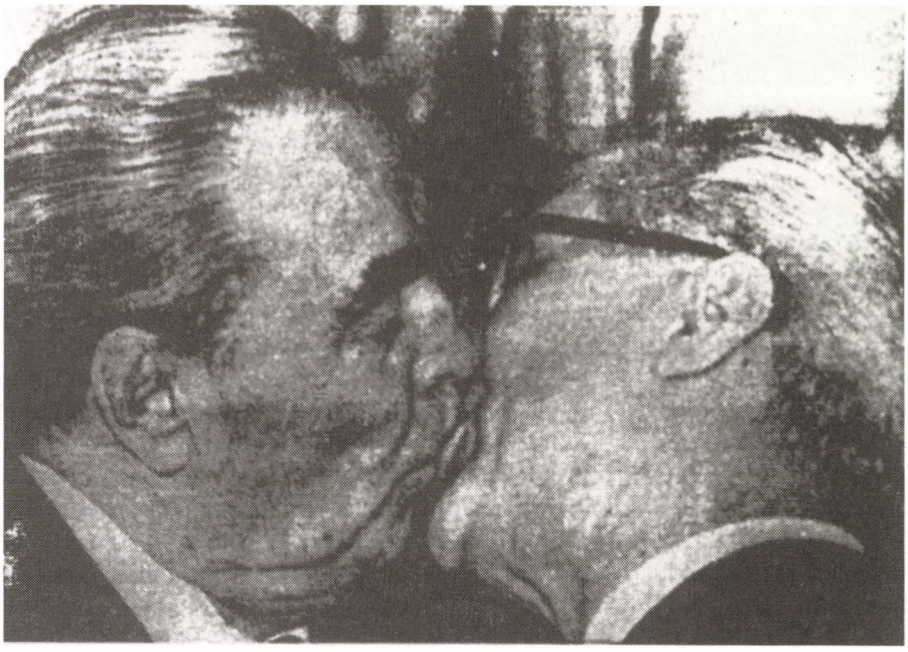
The advent of concrete, physical kissing in the political sphere marked the end of the theocracy. It was a human face that socialism presented for a kiss—a human face called Khrushchev. Kisses symbolized the spirit of reconciliation that followed the Twentieth Party Congress. They were shorthand for "new humanism", "accessibility", "collective leadership", and "simplicity". Khrushchev took pleasure in appearing on the stage of world politics as a highly visible human being, even so far as to pound his desk at the UN with his shoe. It was his kisses that gave the world to understand that the leader of the Soviet Union was human, and would treat others as a man to man. And let us not forget: the first of Khrushchev's kisses were kisses of defiance, plonked on the face of Tito and of comrades just back from the Gulag. They were the kisses of sons embracing, with sighs of relief, after the vengeful Father's death: "We're safe!". They were the kisses of a longing for life. "At last we too can enjoy life." No need to fear now that brother would unmask brother and show him for the class enemy that he never was, with every kiss that he had ever exchanged serving to indict those who had received them.

Khrushchev's kisses had not so much an Orthodox-Byzantine as a populist-peasant smack: "We're brothers, one and all". Rites such as "fraternal assistance" and the "fraternal kiss" were the fruits of this populist graft upon the Orthodox tree. The fraternal kiss stood for the quasi-religious and quasi-kinship ties of a Party brotherhood that was internationalist by definition, and came easily to symbolize the family of nations.

The kisses Khrushchev gave János Kádár after 1956, kisses of reconciliation and forgiveness ("We loved you as brothers, and could not just stand by and watch you dig your own graves"), were meant for the collective face of the Hungarian people, even if some individuals wiped it off in disgust, while others refused as much as to acknowledge this symbolic kiss. In extreme situations, Khrushchev's motto, "Let's all be friends", could easily read, "I'll stay your friend even if it kills you". In Eastern Europe the ways of the religious community of souls and of the hierarchy had parted earlier. The same man who, in the Easter night gave his neighbour the kiss of peace, kow—towed in the political hierarchy, kissing his feet or the hem of his garment. Khrushchev's kiss with a human face symbolized fraternity within the family of states and nations, and also an opening of historical importance: the subservience and servile humiliation manifest on the political and power level was not given symbolic expression. Indeed, we will best understand the import of Khrushchev's kisses in terms of the graphic reconciliation scene between the two feuding aristocratic brothers in Tarkovsky's *Rublev*: as they kiss and make up in church, the camera focuses on their united lips and then zooms in on the elder brother's stamping on the younger's foot with all his might. This image is as symbolic of Khrushchev's kisses as of Brezhnev's: both were without question the "trodding underfoot" type of fraternal kiss.

Still, there is no denying that Khrushchev's kisses were indeed those of a friendly, unsophisticated man, kisses, to boot, reserved only for his political family. Those adopted into the family, Nasser and Fidel, would, of course, be kissed, but he had no kisses for outsiders. Khrushchev was very fastidious on this score.

Brezhnev, on the other hand, was an indiscriminate kisser. Well and fine that he tried to lure Dubcek back into the family in 1968 with his kisses (only to find foot treading to be more effective). But there can be no excuse for his kissing the unsuspecting Jimmy Carter full on the lips at the Vienna signing of the First SALT Agreement. This gauche violation of his private space very likely came as more of a shock to the American President than the invasion of Afghanistan. In Auden's words, "Some thirty inches from my nose / The frontier of my Person goes". And yet Brezhnev, it goes without saying, had not had the slightest intention of encroaching on Carter's personal compass. It was simply yet another case of his being carried away by his emotions—emotions which, as a rule, culminated in a kiss. Joy, gratitude, affection and a sense of the greatness of the moment all went into the making of that kiss, for Brezhnev's kisses were of the sentimental Slavic kind, thence their abundance and boundlessness. Kissing was the somewhat infantile First Secretary's way of



Honecker on the receiving end

actualizing an old Soviet joke: "How far does the Soviet Union stretch?" "As far as it wants to".

Brezhnev, as is known, died of an overdose of kisses, and this in itself would have served his successors as warning. Andropov's reluctant kisses on the cheek, followed by Chernienko's enervated, puckerless kisses (someone else could lift his arms for him, but when it came to puckering, he was on his own) marked the transition to Gorbachev's *perestroika,* that great assault on the comradely kiss in the cheerless, prosaic, last phase of Soviet history. Politics, it seemed, had run out of kisses. Modernization has so far been effective on the level of symbols. The modernity and western nature of the new Soviet leadership is therefore also expressed by their doing without kisses. Their heroic public career behind them, kisses have slunk back to whence they came: the world of Orthodox churches, and ties of kinship and friendship. Though anointed by the Patriarch, Russia's first democratically elected President had no kisses to give him, or anyone else. Indeed, Yeltsin has never been seen even to pucker; what he shows the world is a fine set of teeth, exposed in anger, derision, suspicion, or a boyish grin. He has no time to be sentimental. His is the grin of the ex-Communist self-made man, the post-Soviet version of "Keep smiling": gritting one's teeth and making the best of a world so bad it boggles the mind.

Péter Nádas

The Novelist and His Selfs

"*Ach, Luise, lass... das ist ein zu weites Feld.*" (Oh, Luise, don't—that is *too* wide a field.)

Thus ends Theodor Fontane's novel, *Effi Briest.*

It is a necessary and logical concluding sentence in a novel whose very substance consists of known things. In a way, the substance of any novel are things that are known, although any halfway decent novel will also suggest points of convergence between the world of known things and that of things that are not worth knowing, that cannot be known and, for that matter, must not be known. A novel is an exceedingly ordinary thing: it wades through lived experience. And for that reason it has to acknowledge that there are indeed things in heaven and earth about which we cannot, and should not, speak, or even think.

I can well understand poets and philosophers who are so preoccupied with the unknowable, or with things not worth knowing, or that which must never be known, that they have only disdain for the novel. For the novel cannot afford *not* to speak about things that at least one person knows. What a single person cannot know is the special domain of poetry. Whereas philosophy can deal even with the things no one knows. From the standpoint of knowledge, cognition, experience, the limits of different types of written discourse can be staked out fairly clearly. It's as though I were ascending a well-lighted staircase: history, fiction, poetry, philosophy.

Which still leaves us with the question of what to do with the kind of knowledge possessed by a single individual, especially when that individual happens to be me.

Sometimes I can write a novel using this knowledge, sometimes I can't. When I can, my imagination permits me to experience the painful crisis of my own imponderable fortune as another's crisis-ridden fate. But in this case I am no longer by myself: I speak of the identical or antithetical knowledge of two or more people as if it were my own. Or it may happen that I cannot write a novel, and then not only are my abilities as a novelist open to doubt: the question also arises whether there mightn't be a connection between my own creative crisis and the historical crisis of the novel as a literary form. But when

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Péter Nádas's Egy családregény vége *(The End of a Family Saga) has appeared in nine languages. After its great success in Germany,* Book of Memoirs *will soon be published in French, by Plan. Ivan Sanders is currently at work on the English translation.*

this occurs, my imagination must remain blind and deaf, for at best, I am mulling over my own life experiences.

A more pressing question for me, though, is whether I am able, without my imagination, to obey the Delphic oracle's well-known injunction to know myself. Can I know myself without knowing others? Or to put it differently, is there self-knowledge which is not at the same time knowledge of the world? And conversely, can any knowledge of the world be complete without self-knowledge?

The terrible failures and blind alleys of my own novel writing experience have led me to the simplistic (and, from the point of view of the theoreticians of the novel, no doubt unacceptable) conclusion that the historical crisis of the novel is real only until I can once again rely on my imagination, and experience the crisis of my own unknowable fate as someone else's momentous crisis. As soon as I can do this, I know that my imagination has helped me get closer to other people's experiences: it has helped me observe my own experience from a new and different perspective. I've managed to disentangle the first person singular and the third person, and as a result of the operation I made the first person plural appear—a collective viewpoint. If I can see me through his or her eyes, I have succeeded in viewing the individual from a collective point of view. And when this happens, the position of the narrator is clarified—harmony prevails.

More simply put, I am interested in neither the theory of the novel nor in its history or its sociology. To me all that is old hat—let those who still care go on wearing it. I am, however, intensely interested in my own fortune, in my inexorable destiny, and in the crisis and harmony that also appear, and alternate, in other lives, other fortunes.

As for the uncertain fate of the novel itself, I can dispense with that quite easily. One possibility is to view it in terms of my own personal crisis. I say to myself: I can't write a novel today, though yesterday I still could, so tomorrow I either can or can't. What I really mean to say is that I am able to write a novel today because my imagination is turned on, which doesn't mean I'll still be able tomorrow, because by then it might go blank. In other words, only my daily writing experience can be the judge of whether I have passed from a state of crisis into a blissfully harmonious state, or whether I have fallen from that state of grace, and lapsed into crisis again. It's also possible that my crisis is so dismal and interminable that instead of speaking in my own first-person narrative voice, or in a third person sanctioned by my imagination, I am reduced to ruminating on the crisis of the novel as a genre. But even then I can only conclude that the bourgeois novel finds itself in the same crisis that my own bourgeois self is in. Which again doesn't mean that this bourgeois self may not be in search of narrators and narrative possibilities that are much older than the bourgeois age: that it may not try to fill the same need as did Herodotus when, in words that no doubt must naive to us today, he warned that "the events occurring between men must not sink into oblivion over the course of time, and the memory of great and admirable deeds must not disappear without a trace."

I can hardly say more than what a historian says, or less than what a poet does: I can merely allude to them. I cannot make the subject of my narrative all the things I don't know, and I certainly cannot fashion a story out of things nobody knows. As a thinking person I may not want to appear naive, but as a practising novelist I must remain just that.

"*Madame Bovary, c'est moi.*" I must stick to this naive statement, and stick to it not because I want to remain faithful to the bourgeois novel. No, I am wedded neither to the novel nor to the bourgeois in me. I must stick to this statement, because this naive expression of the imagination is the only possible means by which the age-old need to relate events occurring between people can still be satisfied. It would be ridiculous to claim that I knew everything, and for this very reason I cannot cavalierly speak in the third person, though I can still relate in the first person what can be imagined about that third person. For were I to proclaim what the exhausted late twentieth-century novel still insists on proclaiming, namely that *"je ne suis rien de plus que moi,"* then imagination would indeed have to remain blind and deaf, for then there would be no crossover between the individual and the collective, there would be nothing besides immovable experience, and crisis would stifle the cry for harmony. Yes, in that case our action would eclipse our fate—events would conceal rather than expose our destiny.

"Ach, Luise, lass... das ist ein zu weites Feld." I must abide by this sentence, too. For it is this statement of naive experience that enables me to speak not only of what I may or may not know, but also about things I still don't know—and speak about them in full knowledge of things I know only too well. I must look back on knowing from the vantage point of not knowing. When writing a novel, I must relate things I would never tell myself, if only because I already know them. In a novel I do not speak to or about myself. In any case, knowing myself does not necessarily imply understanding the significance of the events and occurrences of my life: it implies rather that I grasp in other life stories, in other destinies, what in my own life I do not comprehend.

Somewhere on the road between imagination and experience there is a point at which knowledge of the world and self-knowledge meet and overlap. That's where harmony resides. As soon as I pass that point, my crisis resumes.

When someone writes a novel using a first-person narrative voice, he doesn't necessarily intend to talk about himself. He couldn't, even if he wanted to. He chooses this personal, intimate pronoun because he has already settled, or is ready to circumvent, the typically twentieth-century problem of narration in fiction. He must find a double who doesn't have to offer elaborate explanations as to why he speaks or how he has come to know the things he knows: and he also doesn't have to make sure *we* know who speaks—he does. And since he is the one, it's also clear he is not I.

And now I would like to say a few words about something of which I know absolutely nothing.

Much like my other works, I wrote my latest, lengthy novel in the first person. It is true, though, that this time, with two cuts I divided myself into

three. I said I have at least one self to contend with, but in my imagination there may be room for as many as three personae, who will speak concurrently for themselves and for me. I had to deal very carefully and sparingly with incidents and motifs that I lifted straight out of my own life into the world of the novel, for I didn't want to identify myself with any one of the three voices. I was writing a novel after all, not a confession. The first-person narrative invariably steered me toward confession, so I had to keep examining the events of my own life, and use only as many of them as these personae would allow. In the little openings and crevices between them and my own self, imagination could freely do its work, and it did, pushing my ego aside in the process. The logic of my own life history could remain in the dark, though its contours had to be visible. I didn't know why things happened the way they did, but I could more or less tell what belonged and what didn't.

It was the logic of imagination and not of experience that showed me the way. The prompts did not come from me. I was guided by others to the final sentence. By myself I couldn't make it.

The work itself took many years to complete. And with each passing year my resistance to the confessional mode grew more determined. I knew that the way one looks at oneself undergoes significant change in this much time. If I wanted to preserve the unity and integrity of the novel, I had to make certain that these changes did not affect its substance. I don't know how successful these attempts have been, but I did aim for coherence above all.

I had been working on the novel for three years when the narrative self, backed by my imagination, had the structure all sketched out. I had a fairly clear idea what the last chapter would be like. I prepared elaborate notes and was very much inclined to fill in the details right then and there. I felt in that still timeless time of composition that I could more easily and comfortably approach the area about which I already knew so much. I had a scene all worked out, though without my imagination to rely on, I didn't know how I was going to get there. For if I were to write the last chapter of the novel ahead of time, I would be forced to follow a predetermined route, which would render the imagination superfluous. Yet I would have had to do this in order to avoid the unpleasant lure of confession. I did nothing.

I was well into the sixth year of my labours when the last three sentences of my novel took shape. It was a foggy winter afternoon: I stood in a large field, under a heavy, darkening sky. I had no doubt in my mind that these would be the final three sentences. But when I returned from my walk, I didn't dare write them down. If I was going to forget them, I decided, so be it. But I couldn't resist the temptation (fraught with risk though it was) of testing the power and range of these sentences. One usually commends one's most crucial and excruciating concerns to such parting sentences. And this last chapter contains an episode which is a direct and painful borrowing from my own life. The incident seemed so powerful, so oppressive, so insistent, that it would not be shunted aside by my imagination. I would say too much, more than necessary, if I revealed that this incident was my father's suicide or, rather, the actual

place where the suicide was committed. For years I wanted to reach this place, but who could say when and how I would get there.

A young man arrives on a desolate scene, enters a house, walks up a flight of stairs and rings the bell. He would like to meet an eyewitness. A woman wearing glasses opens the door. Four years before finishing my novel, I wrote a play in which I related the story of this tragic encounter. This was the only way I could resist the temptation to write the novel's last chapter before it was time. I stepped out of the novel, and because this was drama, for a time I also stepped out of the first person singular. But it was the only way I could test the strength of those all-important closing sentences. And on the day I was finally ready to tackle the last chapter, my imagination had nothing further to do: everything was ready.

I committed the last three sentences of my novel to paper on April 15, 1985. The work was done. The last sentence ended around the middle of the page. I stared dumbly at the blank bottom half of the paper. After all those years, nothing more to do. It would have made no sense to stifle my sobs.

I had the same feeling about this outbreak as I did about the last chapter. I had written down something that already existed. Now, too, there was nothing more to be done with this distraught man. His sobs caused me neither relief nor elation, nor sadness either: in fact, I had little feeling for this man. With the soul's journey completed, I had no business being in this world: my manuscript didn't need me, I myself didn't need me. The river flowed on, nothing could stop it.

I looked around: what now? Shall I stay put or get up? Should I be glad or go on feeling sorry for myself? The only thing I did do was write the date on the bottom of the page. My letters were so shaky, I knew I couldn't get up even if I wanted to. I stared at the letters and the numbers.

And then, I suddenly had the feeling that somebody had instilled this special date in me a long time ago. The month, the day, the year. April 15, 1985.The numbers had been engraved in my mind—the numbers signifying the year, the month, the day. You dread madness only until you yourself go mad. I had nothing more to fear, I'd already passed the magic barrier. The numbers matched the date of my father's suicide. He killed himself on April 15, 1958, and I finished my novel on April 15, 1985. Could it be that I was nothing but the obedient tool of my elusive fancy?

Who was it that reversed the last two digits in these dates? Or better yet, what was exchanged here? His life for my novel? My work for his death? Who exchanged what? Could it be that my life was nothing but pre-ordained groundwork for this exchange? But since when? Was I nothing but the object of my father's rebirth? Or an instrument? But in whose hand? Was I condemned to life on that fateful day? And was this the day when I must die?

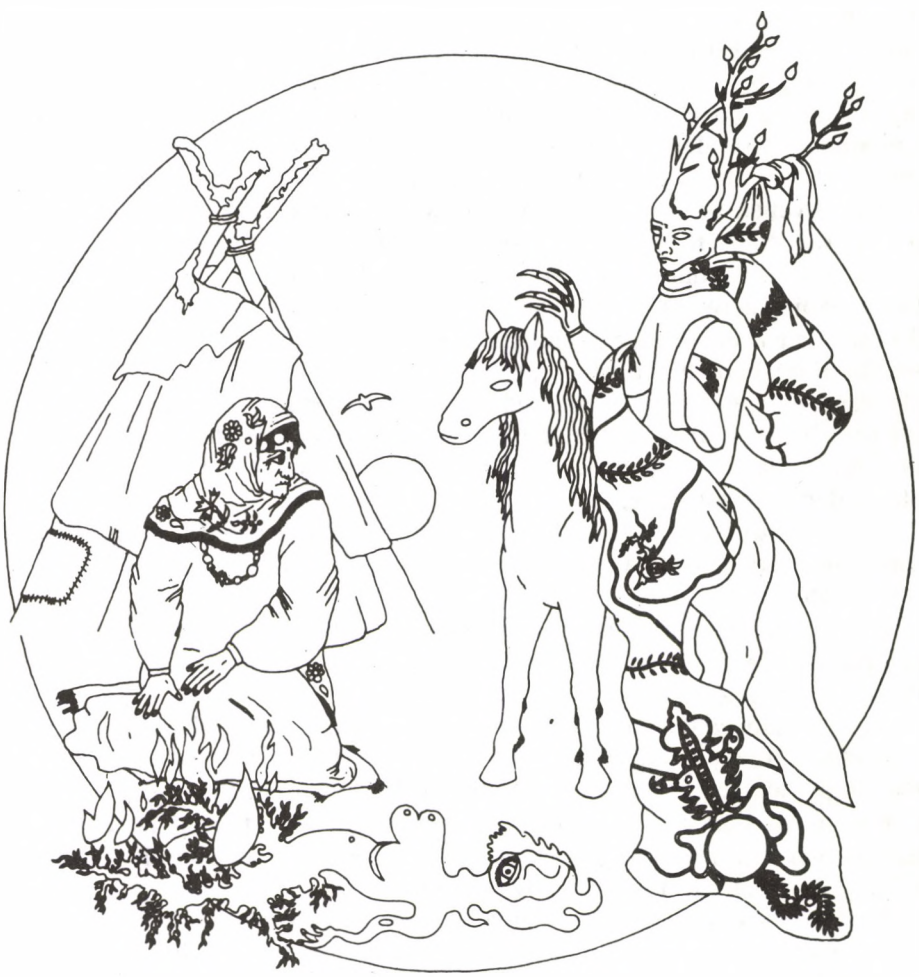
I am not inclined to any form of mysticism, and the mystery of numbers leaves me especially cold. Yet these numbers have been with me all this time... All right, then, let us try to figure out how much time elapsed between these two dates. Naturally, I would have to subtract fifty-eight from eighty-five to obtain the result. But what kind of result? Why, the result of a subtraction. But

what would the number thus gained really signify? The actual duration of my imagined fate? My true destiny?

I pulled out another piece of paper and wrote two numbers neatly under each other. I knew the mathematical operation by which the difference between a larger number and a smaller number can be arrived at. I also knew that I was quite capable of computing this difference. But it struck me that I would have to do it the other way, I'd have to take away eighty-five from fifty-eight. Which again is not impossible: I would simply end up with a negative number. I knew all this. But when it came to the actual calculation, I just couldn't do it. Neither this way nor that, not in my head and not on paper.

And to this day I cannot complete this simple operation.

Translated by Ivan Sanders



Péter Nádas

Book of Memoirs

(Excerpt)

The Soft Light of the Sun

The snow had begun to melt, and though I was afraid of the dogs I decided to walk to school through the woods.

I really had to watch my step here: the trail, beaten into heavy, clayey soil, was steep and narrow, cutting across the coiling roots of knotty, mistletoe-laden oaks and flowering bushes: hedge rose, elder, hawthorne, which even in their present bare state seemed impenetrable; since the thaw set in, the thick layer of leaves covering the smooth clay surface turned sodden, my feet kept slipping; tiny rivulets seeking a channel joined forces and hollowed a groove right in the middle of the trail, becoming a proper stream sparkling in its new-found brownish-yellow bed; in the path's unexpected curves and bends, this brook broadened and swelled, engulfing pebbles and stones, then slowing to a gentler purl; imagining dense forests and wild mountain hideaways around me, I kept leaping between the two banks of my stream, from one side of the trail to the other, back and forth, zig-zagging to and fro, letting myself go, yielding the weight of my body to the inviting slope, sensing all along that the more daring my leaps were, the more forceful and briefer my landings, the more concentrated my search for the very next spot, the more confident I would be, and thus the likelihood that I'd slip or fall would be that much smaller... oh I flew, I plunged, down that slope.

At the bottom of the hill, the forest path finally reached level ground, a spacious clearing with patches of snow; at the other end of it, in the bushes, I saw someone.

But I could not turn back, could not escape, not any more; I just had to control my breathing, make sure I didn't pant or wheeze, in case he would think he's the one making me feel so excited.

He now stepped out from behind the bushes and began walking toward me.

I wanted to appear absolutely calm, as if I were not at all affected by this seemingly accidental meeting, though my back had become uncomfortably wet from all that running, my ears were burning and must have looked ridiculously red in the cold, and my feet suddenly felt awkwardly short and stiff—I was looking at myself now through his eyes.

The sky above us was clear, a great expanse of blue, distant and blank.

Behind the woods, caught in the gnarled treetops, the soft light of the sun filtered through, but the air remained piercingly cold; crows cawed, magpies

"The Soft Light of the Sun," the third chapter of Péter Nádas's Book of Memoirs, *recalls a brief but crucial encounter between the novel's unnamed principal narrator and his friend, Krisztián, when they were both in their early teens, attending school together. The incident referred to by both of them must have taken place a few days prior to this episode. In a subsequent chapter we learn that sometime in the early March of 1953, Krisztián, the child of "reactionary" parents, made a scandalous remark about the imminent death of Stalin ("so the son of a bitch is about to drop dead") in the school lavatory, which the narrator, a militant communist youth at this time, accidentally overheard. Krisztián believes–mistakenly, as it turns out–that his friend reported his comment to the school authorities. It is this alleged report, or denunciation, that he is asking his classmate to take back in this brief meeting.*

The narrative scope of the chapter is narrow indeed–the encounter doesn't last longer than a few minutes–yet, as in the rest of the novel, each moment is opened up to microscopic scrutiny and the view thus offered of the narrator's troubled inner world is extraordinary for its subtlety and detail. Later on, this narrator will mock his compulsive self-analysis and exclaim in exasperation: "oh but why this immersion in minutiae, in the detail of details, away with them;", though in a sense his exasperation is also feigned, because he is quick to add that endless dissections are necessary if we want to discover how rich our inner life is, "and it is rich, so why not scrutinize it with relish?"

Because this is a first-person narrative, our hero's perception of Krisztián and his assessment of their relationship is thoroughly subjective. We get a taste of a cooler, plainer subjectivity in the eighteenth, penultimate chapter of the novel, which is narrated entirely by the adult Krisztián. Here the childhood friend presents, among other things, his version of the encounter in the woods described in "The Soft Light of the Sun".

Ivan Sanders

chattered in the eerie silence, and you could feel that as soon as the sun went down everything would be cold and stiff again.

We walked toward each other very slowly.

Gold buttons gleamed on his long, dark-blue overcoat, his fine leather bag he slung casually over his shoulder, as always, though as a result he had to twist his long neck and bend over a little; his walk nevertheless was as supple and graceful as if he were swaying back and forth in some oblivious softness, still, he raised his head high: he watched, he listened.

It took a very long time to cover the distance; from the moment I spotted him behind the bushes, I had to confront and also keep under a lid my most contradictory and clandestine feelings: "Krisztián", I would have loved to cry

out in my surprise, if only because in his name, which I had not the courage to utter even during the ill-fated first stages of our friendship and only kept muttering to myself afterwards, I sensed the same discriminating elegance I did in his whole being, his name had that same irresistible attraction for me, an attraction I knew I mustn't yield to in any shape or form; if I said his name out loud, it would be like touching his naked body; for this reason I avoided him, I always waited until he began walking home with others, so as not to give the impression that I was walking that way because he was; even in school I was careful not to get too close to him, lest I wind up having to address him or in a sudden commotion brush against his body; at the same time, of course, I kept watching him, trailed him like a shadow, mimicked his movements in front of the mirror; and it was achingly pleasurable to know that while I was snooping after him, and secretly imitating him, trying to evoke in myself those hidden qualities and characteristics that would make me resemble him while doing all that, he knew nothing, he *couldn't* know, or feel, that I was always with him, and he was always with me; in reality, he didn't even bother to look at me, I was like a neutral object to him, utterly superfluous, devoid of interest.

Of course my good sense cautioned me about these passionate feelings; it was as if two separate beings were coexisting in me, totally independent of each other; at times it seemed as though all the joys and sufferings his mere existence were causing me were nothing more than silly games not even worth talking about, yes, a part of me hated and spurned him as much as my other self loved and respected him; because I was anxious to avoid giving any indication of either hate or love, I was actually the one who acted as though he were a neutral object; my love was much too overpowering and passionate for me to let him in on it, that would have rendered me totally defenceless; my hatred, on the other hand, drove me to humiliating fantasies which I was naturally too terrified to act on, so I, and not he, acted as though I was unapproachable, impervious even to his fleeting glance.

"There is something I would like to ask you," he said coolly, calling me by my name (at this point the distance between us was no greater than an arm's length and we both had to stop), "and I would greatly appreciate it if you could do it for me."

I felt the blood rushing to my face.

Which he, too, would immediately notice.

The ingratiating casualness with which he uttered my name (though I knew he did it merely to be true to his usual, impeccable form) had a devastating effect on me: not only did I feel that my feet were too short, now I felt I was one big head hovering somewhere close to the ground, an ill-proportioned, repulsive insect... and in my embarrassment something slipped out which should not have: "Krisztián", I said aloud, I actually pronounced his name, and alas it sounded too tender, frightened almost, in any case, humble, and certainly out of tune with his clear, self-imposed resolve to wait around and even approach me with a request, so almost as if he had misheard or couldn't believe what he heard, he raised his eyebrows too high and obligingly leaned closer: "Pardon? I beg your pardon?"

he asked, and I, finding something unexpectedly pleasant in my embarrassment, made myself sound even mellower, "oh nothing, nothing," I replied quietly, "I just said it, I just said your name, anything wrong with that?"

His thick lips parted a little, his eyelids flickered, his light brown complexion, as though from repressed excitement, darkened somewhat, his black pupils contracted, making the pale green iris appear even more dilated... but no, I don't think it was his eyes, the shape of his face, the wide and nervously mobile forehead, the narrow cheeks, the dimpled chin, the disproportionately small, almost pointed and perhaps still undeveloped nose that made the most profound and most painfully beautiful impression on me, but his colouring: in the green of his eyes, shining forth from the savagely sensual brown of his skin, there was something abstractly ethereal, a clamouring for heights, while the chapped red lips, the unmanageably curly mass of black hair pulled you down into dark depths; the unabashed boldness of his glance made me recall our intimate moments together, when, absorbed by each other's looks (looks that always suggested hostility *and* hidden love), we could tell that our mutual attraction was based on nothing more than uncontrollable, inordinate curiosity: we were curious about each other, interested only in an appearance, though this curiosity did draw us close, it bound us together, indeed it was deeper than any so-called dangerous inclination could ever be, for it was undirected, insatiable... yet our uniformly narrowing pupils and dilating irises had to disclose something in our eyes, they had to make it palpably clear that our supposed intimacy was a pious fraud, and that in reality we were irreconcilably different.

It was almost as if I wasn't looking at a human form but at two terrifying magic globes.

This time, however, we couldn't keep our eyes on each other for long, and though neither of us looked away, I knew there was a change; his eyes lost their open, gratuitous brilliance, they filled up now with motive, purpose, they became dimmer, glazed over, took cover as it were.

"I must ask you," he said quietly but firmly (and, lest I interrupt him again, moved closer and abruptly grasped my arm), "not to report me to the principal, or if you already have, to try to take it back."

He bit his lips and pulled at my arm, his eyes blinked and his voice suddenly lost the soft depth of self-confidence; he spat out these words as if he didn't even want the expelled air from his mouth to touch his lips, he wished to thrust out these hated sounds, get them out of his system, simply assure himself that he did all he could, although he had as little faith in the efficacy of his words as he did in my malleability, and for this reason I don't think he was particularly interested in my response, and besides, it wasn't at all clear what he meant by "taking it back"—I think he knew all along that he was treading on slippery ground; he was looking at me, but I took altogether too much out of him to make his voice sound humbly thin, so he probably didn't even see my face, in his eyes I must have been a mere blot, a dissolving blot.

Though as far as I was concerned, that wondrous feeling of superiority made me feel more confident than ever.

A request was put to me, which I had the power either to grant or refuse; the moment arrived when I could finally prove my own importance, when at my own will, my own pleasure, I could either reassure or destroy him; with a single word I could get even for all my hurts, hurts which were not even his doing, I caused them myself because of him: the bitter pain of being ignored he evoked in me unknowingly, innocently, by simply being alive—it was enough of an affront that he moved so gracefully and wore nice clothes, and talked and played with others, and with me was unable, or unwilling, to find that opening, that avenue of contact for which I yearned and about which I myself didn't know what it should be... he may have been as much as a head taller than I, but at this moment I was looking down at him; I found his forced smile distasteful, and as far as my body was concerned, not only did it regain its normal dimensions, it assumed the lightness of that secure state when our consciousness stops playing and struggling, and with a shrug surrenders to all its contradictory emotions, rendering all outward appearance and show irrelevant... I was no longer interested in how I looked, or in him liking me; I did feel the chill of cooling perspiration on my back, the dampness in my leaky shoes, the unpleasant sting of my cheap trousers clinging to my thighs, and I felt, too, my burning ears, my smallness, my ugliness, but there was no longer anything hurtful or humiliating in this, for in spite of the unrelieved misery of physicality, I was free and powerful now, *felt* free inside; I knew I loved him, and that no matter what he did I couldn't stop loving him; I was completely exposed and defenseless, and I could either get him for that or forgive him, the two really amounted to the same thing; to be sure, he didn't seem as beautiful and enticing as he did in my fantasies, or when he overwhelmed me with his sudden appearance; his dark skin turned sallow, and I suspected he'd eaten something with garlic in it, so this time I didn't feel like inhaling the smell of his breath; moreover, the humility expressed in his smile was so twisted, so exaggerated, it seemed highly suspicious, suggesting that though his fear may have been genuine, he was anxious not to show it, preferred to conceal it with pride, substitute it with mock humility; he was playing up to me but deceiving me at the same time.

I blushed and quickly pulled away my arm.

It seemed I did not have a choice after all, I could not just tell him anything I felt like, as far as my emotions were concerned every possible answer appeared a dead end; it didn't occur to me to denounce him but if I did it, if now I really did it, then I would have removed him from me for good, they might even take him away; if, however, I pretended to be swayed by his plea, then I let myself be misled by his clumsy show of humility, in which case his victory would be far too easy for him to appreciate my generosity; I wasn't embarrassed about blushing, if anything, I wanted him to notice it, I would have liked nothing more than for him to discover my feelings and hopefully not object to them; nevertheless, feeling myself blush made me realize that nothing could help now, regardless of what I did or said, he would again slip through my fingers, and all that would remain would be just another inexplicable, discon-

certing moment... and my empty fantasies; but if that's the case, I suddenly thought, then I must be true to my convictions and act sensibly, cruelly if need be, though I also knew that this alternative brought me close to my father and mother (even if I didn't actually think of them at the moment), because as much as I would have liked to have the courage of my own convictions, I knew my beliefs weren't all mine; at the same time the situation was much too peculiar and uniquely private for my parents to appear suddenly before my mind's eye and whisper specific words in my ear, words which I could then parrot; yet they were there, all right, hiding out in my thoughts, more cosily persistent than ever, ready for action; I knew well enough that there were forms of human behaviour capable of eliminating emotional considerations and acting purely on the bases of principles known as convictions, though I knew, too, that I would never be strong enough to stifle my emotions.

"I am not asking for myself, you understand," he said even more sharply; his hand from which I withdrew my arm just now was still in the air, hesitating: he had long fingers, a slender wrist, but no, I didn't let him finish, I didn't want to see him like this, I interrupted: "First of all, it would be nice if you could distinguish between denunciation and a mere report."

But pretending not to have heard what I said, he continued the interrupted sentence: "I'd just like to spare my mother."

We kept interrupting each other after that.

"If you think I am a stool pigeon, we have nothing further to discuss."

"I saw you go into the teachers' room after class, I saw you."

"What makes you think I have *you* on my mind all the time?"

"You do know my mother has a heart condition."

I burst out laughing. And there was strength in this laugh.

"When you have to face the consequences of your words, then she has a heart condition."

His eyes regained their sparkle by now, as if they were newly illuminated by some cold inner light; the garlic-smelling thrust of words hit me in the face: "What are you after then, what? I'll lick your ass, if that's what you want."

Something stirred nearby and automatically almost, we turned our heads: a hare darted across the snowy field.

I wasn't looking at the hare (who at the edge of the field must have melted into the thicket), I was watching him; in our fury, though in a way obliviously, we ended up standing very close to each other; if he *had* paid any attention, he could feel me breathing down his neck, which I did despite my attempts to hold back; the casual knot of his striped scarf came even looser, the top button of his shirt was undone, and his collar must have slipped under the neck of his sweater because where it seemed gently tucked in, his naked neck, like a strange new landscape, appeared before me; embedded in taut muscles and showing through the smooth skin ever so faintly, a vein seemed to be pulsing evenly, and the tip of the gently protruding Adam's apple, at unpredictable intervals but within well-defined bounds, kept moving up and down; the blood which had rushed to his face while he was shouting now receded, I saw him

regain his normal complexion; his fleshy lips again parted somewhat, and with his glance he followed the hare's path—when at a certain point it came to rest, I knew the hare had disappeared.

As the sun sank behind the woods, its pale yellow light was reflected in the green of his eyes; it seemed as though the persistent chattering of magpies, the incessant cawing of crows, as well as the smell of the air, the sounds of the woods were made of the same tangible certainty as his face, which was sharp now, hard, mobile even in its immobility; it did not reflect any emotion, it simply was, and gave itself over easily and gracefully to the sights before him; for me at this moment it wasn't so much his beauty, the harmony of his features and his colouring that were so very enviable, so captivating, though I longed for them often enough—what really took my breath away was his innate ability to give himself over to each moment, totally, unreservedly; when I looked in the mirror I had to conclude I wasn't that ugly myself, but what I really wanted was to look like him, to be just like him... my eyes were blue, and they seemed clear, transparent, my blond hair fell on my white forehead in springy waves, and still I felt my sensitive, vulnerable and fragile features to be deceptive and false—while others thought my face charming and gentle, and liked to touch it, caress it, I thought it coarse and vulgar; I was depraved and insidious, I decided; there was nothing gentle about me at all, I could not bring myself to like myself; I shielded my real self with a mask, I realized, and so as not to disappoint people too much, I enacted roles which fitted my outward appearance much more than they did my true impulses; I tried to be pleasantly attentive, understanding, lightly cheerful, ingratiatingly serene, though in reality I was sullen and irritable, my senses hankered for coarser pleasures, I was irascible, hateful—I would have preferred keeping my head bowed all the time, so that I wouldn't have to see anyone, and no one would see me, and the only reason I did look openly into people's eyes was to check their glance, to see how effective my performance was; actually, though I succeeded in deceiving just about everyone, I nevertheless felt comfortable only when alone: those I was able to dupe I had to despise for their stupidity and blindness, while those who got suspicious, who were not so gullible, who were not in the habit of letting themselves be swayed—why, to those people I was so excessively solicitous and attentive, it took all the energy I had just to keep going; at such moments I felt absurdly, blissfully faint, for I realized that my slyness, my slipperiness, my urge to dominate were most apparent in precisely those moments when I succeeded in winning over people who were otherwise alien to me, or even hateful, or at best indifferent; I wanted everyone to love me, and I could not love anyone; I felt beauty's deceitful lure, but I also knew that anyone with such a fanatic craving for beauty, such an eye for it, is in reality incapable of giving or receiving love... yet I couldn't give up this obsession, for though I felt that my allegedly handsome face was not really mine, this handsomeness could still be used as part of the deception which was certainly all mine and which could even lend me a sense of power; I had a definite aversion to people who were ugly or crippled, which was all too understandable: though they kept telling me I was good-looking, and I saw it

myself when I looked in the mirror, I still felt ugly, repulsive even—myself I could not deceive, my innermost feelings betrayed more faithfully what I was really like than the sense of power imparted by the charm of my looks; this being so, I longed for the kind of beauty in which external and internal traits meshed, in which a harmonious exterior shielded strength and goodness, and not the disarray of a twisted soul; I longed for perfection, in other words, or at least a total identification with my true self, for the freedom to be imperfect, to be gloriously mean and wicked... but that far that inner self would not let me go.

"I had no intention of denouncing you," I told him very quietly (he barely moved his head), "and even if I did, you could always deny it and say you were thinking of your dog; it would take some explaining, but you *could* have been thinking of your dog."

My whispered words were not any weightier than the cloud of mist formed in the cold light, yet every word touched his motionless face; actually, I could not have been any more cleverly cunning: I held out the possibility of doing something I had no intention whatever of doing, and to counteract my mild threat I immediately offered him a handy explanation with which to slip out of the net I threw over him; at the same time, though, I also betrayed my so-called conviction that I *should* by right denounce him, only then would I be strong and hard... and I just may, I thought to myself, I just may: lower than this I cannot sink... by then I lost all feeling of my body, I was there, hovering weightlessly over me, but way too high, way too low.

Nothing was more important now, words were entirely without importance, only that mist mattered, the mist I exhaled, the mist that touched his skin, though not even this was sufficient, for somehow his gaze wavered, froze, it seemed he didn't quite understand what I was getting at.

"It never occurred to me to do it, believe me."

He finally turned back his head and his eyes told me that his suspicions were gone.

"It didn't?" he asked, also in a whisper, and his eyes again became open, penetrable, just the way I liked them. "No, it didn't," I whispered decisively, not knowing any more what this denial was actually referring to; now that I could finally penetrate his gaze, I no longer had to play-act, and what was even more important, I felt my own eyes opening; "No?" he asked again, with no more suspicion in his voice, only a slight hesitation, the hesitation of a lover; and the puff of mist that came out with the word touched my lips... "No, not at all," I whispered; and then suddenly there was silence; we looked at each other, and were so close, so very close, I hardly needed to move my head forward: with my mouth I touched his lips.

My mother, who was brought home from the hospital three days earlier, was in bed at home; as soon as I was alone, after Krisztián disappeared behind the bushes, this is what first came to mind: mother lying in her big bed, and reaching for me with her long, naked arm...

I could still feel his lip on my mouth, the chaps on that unknown skin, the softness of the fleshy lips, their scent, which stayed with me, on my mouth—I

still sensed the slight twitch of the two lips, their slow parting under my own closed mouth, and then the slowly exhaled air, which became mine, and the air he breathed in, air taken from me, yet—and I know this contradicts what I've just described—I still have the feeling that what happened between us could not be called a kiss, and not only because our lips barely touched, but also because for both of us it was an instinctive move, whose purposeful, let alone erotic application neither of us quite understood yet, and most of all because at that moment my mouth was but the ultimate means of persuasion, the final, wordless argument—he breathed on me the last of his fears and drew in his new-found trust.

I don't even know how we separated finally; one thing is certain, though: for an infinitesimal fraction of that moment I did give myself over to feeling his lips, sensing at the same time that he, with his breathing, was also giving himself over to me; knowing this I am not about to claim, it would be ridiculous to claim, that our physical contact, our unique form of argumentation, lacked sensuality—no, no, it was *very* sensual, but purely that, free of any ulterior motive, not the kind that accompanies, naturally enough, an adult kiss; our mouths, regardless of what had gone on before and what would follow, were quite content to give each other what two mouths in a fraction of a second could give: fulfilment, relief, acquittance... that's when I must have closed my eyes, the second when no sight, no circumstance, could possibly matter any longer, so when I think about that moment now, I still must ask: *can* a kiss be anything else, anything more than that?

When I opened my eyes he was talking.

"Do you know where those hares stay in winter?"

And though his voice sounded deeper and perhaps even raspier than usual, there was no sign of haste or fluster in it: he asked this question so naturally, with such self-evident ease, as if that hare had run across the field just then, and not minutes earlier, as though nothing had happened between those two points in time; and as I now watched his face, his eyes, his neck, as I took in the for me still coldly distant sight he must have presented just then, standing as he did against a shimmering, opaline background laced with twigs and tree tops—as I saw all that, I must have experienced, at least momentarily, the shock of a fatal, irretrievable error; for his question didn't at all indicate that in his quite natural, almost obligatory, embarrassment he groped for the safety of a neutral topic—neither in his eyes, nor in his facial features or posture could one discover the slightest trace of embarrassment; he remained as poised, as confident, as cool, as he was on other occasions—or perhaps it would be more correct to say that after being relieved of his fears by the kiss, he was again his former, unreachable self, which by no means meant that he was unconcerned or indifferent about the things that were happening to him, quite on the contrary: to such an extent was he exposed to each and every moment of his existence, always *the* moment that had to come alive in him, that all past and possible future moments were forced out of him, as it were, he seemed to be standing apart, outside of his own being, as though he were never really where he was supposed to be; I, on the

other hand, forever remained a prisoner of my past: a single emphatic moment was capable of arousing in me such a volume of passion and suffering that I had no time left for the next moment, so I, like him, though in a quite different way, also remained outside of it; I could never follow him.

"I have no idea where." I mumbled morosely, as if I'd just been awakened.

"Maybe they stay in the ground."

"In the ground?"

"Yes, I bet with some clever trap we could catch a whole brood."

Afterwards, I was able to open the door calmly, quietly, and probably did not drop my schoolbag as I did on other days, it didn't hit the tile floor with a thud, the heavy door didn't slam shut behind me—they had no way of knowing I was home; I didn't run up the oak stairs to the foyer, either, and though I wasn't quite conscious of these peculiar changes of the skipped routine, and had absolutely no inkling that I would move about more quietly and cautiously from now on, would slow down and become even more introspective, I still wasn't prevented by these signs from being aware of things going on around me, indeed from seeing them even more sharply, except it would now be from the perspective of utter indifference; the dining room's French door was wide open, and from the faint clang and tinkle of dishes I could tell I was late, they almost finished eating lunch, though this did not bother me in the least: it was nice and dim in the foyer, and pleasantly warm, too, some late afternoon light seeped through the opalescent glass panes of the tall door, I kept hearing the scraping, bubbling sound of the radiator, and at regular intervals the metallic ping of the pipes... I may have stood there a long while, enveloped in the heavy smell of freshly fried beef patties, and in the floor-length mirror could even see myself, though at the moment the rug's purple reflection was more important to me than my face or body—their black contours faded into the mirror's silvery light.

I understood well, how could I not, that by mentioning the hares we might trap, he tried to entice me with the possibility of some kind of joint undertaking, and I sensed, too, that if he *was* waiting for an answer, he expected me to pull myself together, revert to the customary norms of our relationship, and come up with a decent idea concerning something to undertake together, which could be anything, really: no need to insist on those stupid hares, it could be any sort of joint endeavour that required strength and skill, and was therefore masculine enough; but I found this alternative, offered to me with patient chivalrousness, much too simplistic, and in view of what'd just happened between us, somewhat ludicrous—and not only because this sort of thing no longer suited our age but also because its very childishness bespoke an idea born of defensive haste, aimed at ignoring what had just transpired—a ploy, in short, a bit of evasive action, a diversion of true emotions, which nevertheless proved to be a more sensible solution in the end than whatever I would have been able to come up with at a moment's notice...the only thing was that at that moment, under those circumstances, nothing could be less desirable to me than being sensible; I was exuding the joy of relief just then, it streamed forth as

though made of some tangible substance, and it kept pulsating, radiating, seeking him out, and I had no other wish in the world than to remain in this state, a state in which our body yields unstoppably to all that's instinctual in it, and sensuous, and emotive, losing as much of its weight and mass in the process as is displaced by the liberated energies, indeed until it stops being the body we so often consider a sheer burden; it was this state I wanted preserved, and extended to all my future moments; I wanted to break down all the barriers, the forces of habit, education, manners, everything that robs us of our ordinary moments, by preventing us from communicating to others the profoundest truths of our being, until it is no longer we existing in time but time existing, vacuously and efficiently, for us; and while trying obstinately, unbendingly to preserve myself for this moment (not being able at all to address him in a normal, casual-sounding voice), I had to notice that nothing of what I was going through was reaching him, though to remain that calm and patient in the face of such unrestrained yearning, he had to rely on every bit of his humane-seeming psychological cleverness; what he actually did was to make himself into a blank wall, a wall which impassively deflected and thrust back everything emanating from me and streaming in his direction, with the result that it was I, not he, who was surrounded and embraced by this emanation: I felt I was under a wrap, one with no edges, no precise borders, though it still afforded me with some protection, for it and I were actually one: I could float in it quite pleasantly, though one careless move and I knew it would disintegrate, an emphatic word and all that erupted from my body would dissolve into thin air, like the veil of mist we exhaled; he was looking at me, straight at me, we saw nothing but each other's eyes, yet he became more and more distant, whereas I stayed where I was; but I *did* want to stay there, precisely as I was: only in this utterly vulnerable, this insanely defenseless state could I perceive my true self, indeed, this was the moment, the place, where I first discovered how grand, how beautiful, how perilous my raging senses were: this was the real me, not the uncertain outlines thrown back by the mirror but this; nevertheless I had to notice his growing remoteness: first the slight shock which, in spite of all his good intentions and self-discipline, was there on his face, and then the tiny, childishly conceited smile with which he counteracted the slightness of the shock, and managed to move so far away that he no longer had to hesitate, from that distance he could afford to glance back, with a curiosity, moreover, that was tinged with empathy... but I said nothing, I made no move: my being found perfect fulfilment in just this silent state, I revelled in my own importance, and not even the disappearance of the last trace of that smile seemed to bother me... and then the silence became quite perceptible, you could again hear the woods, the magpies, the scraping of a twig in the distance, a stream rushing over sharp stones, and us: you could hear our own breathing.

"Come over later," he said, raising his voice a little, which sounded somewhat reedier now, and signified a great many things, and very contradictory things, at that; for one thing, the unnatural intonation of the phrase seemed more significant than the actual meaning, for it suggested that he was ill at ease:

nothing was ever as simple as one would have liked to believe, no matter how far he managed to back away with his glance, I still had him, it was my very silence that forced him to make the kind of concession he otherwise would not dream of making, although the odd intonation also implied that our reconciliation could not be taken seriously, I shouldn't even think of accepting this vague invitation, in other words, I should actually consider it a polite warning, I had no more right to set foot in their house than I had had until now; but these words were spoken, and they referred to an earlier afternoon when his mother was shouting from the window and I held two walnuts in my hand.

"Krisztián! Krisztián, where are you? Krisztián, why must I keep screaming? Krisztián!"

It was autumn, we stood under the walnut tree, in a quiet drizzle, at dusk which was heavy with mists, in the garden that had a yellowish, reddish glow; he held a large, flat stone in his hand, and as he didn't leave himself enough time to completely straighten out, I couldn't be sure if the next moment he wasn't going to bash my head in with that stone.

"Our house you haven't got around to stealing yet, all right? and as long as it still belongs to us, I will kindly ask you not to set foot in it ever again, is that clear?"

There was nothing funny about what he said, yet I laughed.

"You stole this precious house from people you lived off, and it's no sin to steal back from a thief, and that's what you people are—thieves."

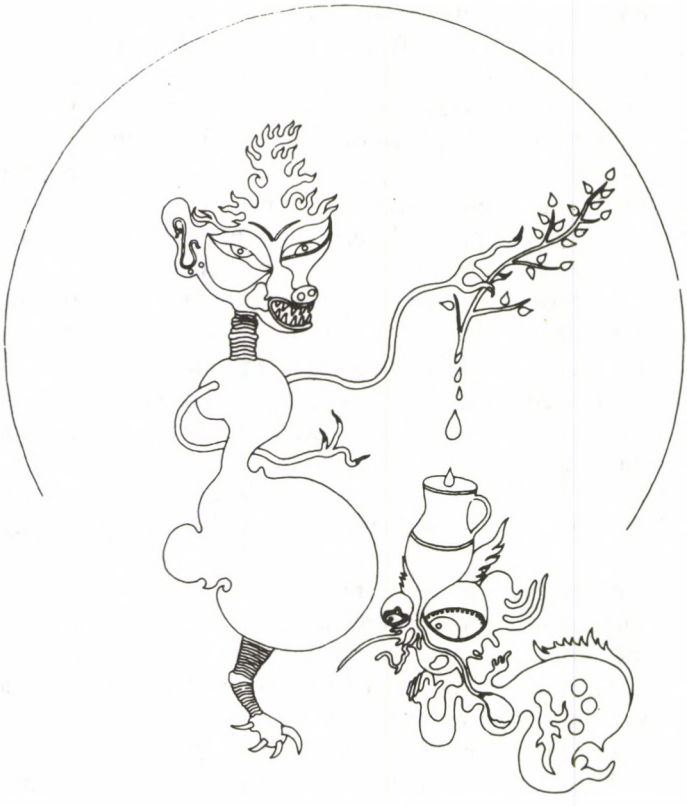
It took a while for us to assess the consequences of the words just spoken, and no matter how titillatingly pleasurable it was to utter them, you could tell, from his anger and from my serene though somewhat abstract satisfaction, that all this was nothing but revenge—reprisals for those barely noticeable injuries that accumulated in us during our brief though passionate and stormy friendship; for months we had spent just about every hour of the day in each other's company, with my curiosity invariably pushing me past the glaring inequalities between us; our quarrel, therefore, was the inevitable reverse side of our intimacy, though plausible explanations notwithstanding, this unexpected outburst took both of us so far afield that turning back was wellnigh impossible, and as improbable as it may have seemed to do this, I had to drop the two walnuts I was holding in my hand and hear them plop down on the wet leaves; his mother was still shouting for him, and I started walking toward the garden gate, quite pleased with myself, actually, as if I had settled something once and for all.

He looked me straight in the eye, and waited.

That last, ambiguously phrased sentence, uttered as a final gesture perhaps, removed me, too, from that moment, the moment from which I thought I could not and would not break away; but I *had* to sense the growing distance, not only in his eyes but in me as well, even if this momentary discovery, this sudden distraction did not make a stronger impact than a fleeting memory does: a sudden flash it was, no more, a slippery-quick fish pushing its head above the motionless surface of he moment, breathing in the new environment,

and sinking back into the world of silence, leaving only a few fading rings in its wake; still, the reminder constrained me, it marked a turning point, one emphatic and compelling enough to act as a warning that what was happening to us now was but the inevitable consequence of a previous occurrence, and was as much related to events about to happen as it was to those that occurred earlier still; I could go on yearning, and blustering, but it was utterly absurd to think I could remain locked in the moment that gave me such joy, such pleasure; the mere fact that I was forced to experience the quick passing of this happiness surely indicated that though I may have thought I was bound to it, I was no longer there, I'd passed it, was already reflecting on it... still, I couldn't answer him, although the way he held himself just then suggested a willingness to accept my reply—at this point I would have *liked* to reply, indeed felt that without a reply I could not go on; he stood before me and looked as if he were about to take the first step, but then, flinging his schoolbag over his shoulder, he suddenly turned around and started walking toward the bushes, in the same direction, toward the same spot, where he had first appeared.

Translated by Ivan Sanders



Sándor Radnóti

The German Reception of "Book of Memoirs"

Péter Nádas: *Buch der Erinnerungen.* Translated by Hildegard Grosche. Rowohlt, Berlin, 1991. 1308 pp.

In late 1991 virtually all important German daily papers devoted reviews to the German translation of *Emlékiratok könyve* (Book of Memoirs). Among those publishing reviews were the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Taz* of Berlin, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, the *Stuttgarter Zeitung,* and *Die Presse* and *Standard* in Vienna. One of the many weeklies publishing prominent reviews was *Die Zeit*. Péter Nádas was awarded a prize by the Austrian government. In January the novel figured fourth on the list of recommended books compiled every month for Südwestfunk by twenty-nine German critics, including Marcel Reich-Raniczki and Hellmuth Karasek. In February the book went to the top of this list.

Most of the reviewers do not seem to know the Hungarian scene too well. György Dalos, in the *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt,* the Hungarian born Eva Haldimann, a long-standing advocate of Hungarian literature, writing in the *Neue Zürcher,* and the writer and translator Zsuzsanna Gahse, also Hungarian-born, are, naturally, exceptions. They are familiar with the domestic reception of the novel, Dalos even quotes from Péter Balassa's essay on it. Most of the others, however, have only the novel to go by, and at most some remember *Egy családregény vége* (The End of a Family Saga), an earlier Nádas novel, which came out in German in 1979. Only a less sophisticated account found it necessary to emphasize that "the Hungarian Péter Nádas has created a piece of world literature . . . which fits perfectly into the rich traditions of European literature." Most think that this goes without saying. More importantly, however, the reviews do not focus, at least explicitly, on the German theme of the novel or its relation to German culture. Two of the three memoirs in the novel, which unfold chapter by chapter, are set on German soil, one in the *fin de siècle* world of the Emperor William II, the other in the East Berlin of the 1970's. Indeed, the critics could have focused on the German theme in at least two unfortunate ways. One could have been the major

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culture's acceptance of the liegeman's due, the other the resentful protection of a culture against the outsider. The fact that they did not do either does not mean that the influence of Thomas Mann passed unnoticed, or the peculiar *hommage* character of the *fin de siècle* sections, the memoirs of Thomas Thoenissen. The literary heritage of Musil, Broch, Joseph Roth, Richard Beer-Hofmann, and Proust is recognized, Jean Genet's "sexually open novel" is very aptly mentioned. A reference to Flaubert, in which *Book of Memoirs* was the Hungarian *Education Sentimentale*, was seized on, quoted or echoed by the later reviews.

Of the three memoirs, or the three "realities", of the novel, the one closest to us in time is that set in East Berlin. "One might say that in this line of the plot the other two realities simply become the past. But the deeper one penetrates the labyrinth of the novel, the clearer it becomes that it is always the same story, the same thing recurring all the time. In other words, the theme is the lack of progress itself. A reader only paying attention to Nádas's winding sentences, ceaselessly moving towards perfection, might even think the author a conventional one, loyal to the 19th century which schooled him. But the farther readers go on the shady paths of the novel's forest, the more the suspicion is aroused in them that the writer has been playing with them. By continuing an old literary discourse, which goes back all the way to Dante, he demonstrates that what seems to be bygone is actually present. Here is, then, a truly modern book, which does not project reality, but disassembles it with malicious precision. Its literary devices seem to come from the mothballs of realism—this is in fact the provocation of this novel, in which, for a good hundred years, the world and its affairs have been waiting in vain for someone who knows what life is about," says Thomas Schmid in his review, "The Fury of Memory. Péter Nádas's Great Novel on the European Tragedy of Personality" (*Die Zeit*, 6 December 1991.).

But this is exactly what Joachim Scholl in the 1992/3 issue of *Zitty*, a Berlin magazine, seems to call into question. His "In the Museum of Modernity—Péter Nádas's Epic of Memory" is the most unfavourable review of the novel and, as far as I know, its only unconditional rejection. He maintains with the latest postmodern spite (in an analysis based on an unquestionable understanding of the novel) that Nádas's book gives the last stroke to the aesthetic forms of literary modernity—and in this respect it could indeed be a masterwork, if the author had the slightest awareness of this. His Nádas is not the heir of the 19th century, but an author moving away from the "primitively epical" (Musil), focusing on interior monologue, analysis, reflection, and language, an author with ambitions for a state of mind that is not bound to things, for the speaking of "all" and for a philosophical summary of his age. In other words, his Nádas tries to continue the uncontinuable poetic traditions of the Enlightenment (represented by writers such as Thomas Mann, Broch, Joyce, and Proust), which results, instead of a Whole of some sort, in unintended comedy. The more seriously the book takes itself, the more comic it is. "The book is doomed by the pathos of modernity, in which all its contemporary elements dissolve. The few details which are really interesting, such as the Hungarian revolution

of 1956, or the atmosphere of East Berlin, are undermined by the lament of thought, which makes it impossible for events to become a mere story, because each of them is immediately pushed to transcendence and everlasting words of wisdom."

Other critics also note that Nádas does not take much interest in furthering his plot, "his richly complex, hyperbolic sentences" aim at the analytical telling of the moment (says Jürgen Engler in the first 1992 issue of *Freitag* in Berlin), that the atmospheric description obstructs plot and the method of narration is "the art of retardation." Hansjörg Graf, the reviewer of *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* however, establishes a hierarchy of some sort between the memoirs, and calls the child's story set in the Budapest of the 1950's the "incubation". He detects the political trauma behind the self-observing narcissism; the decadent protagonist of the novel is a victim of history. Michael Roesler, in the February issue of *Szene Hamburg,* asserts that the novel casts an introvert's glance at the sensibility of our age, so deeply affected by totalitarianism. Matthias Rüb goes as far as calling the novel the interior story of this century, marked by its ideologies. (This view is ridiculed by one of the few unfavourable reviews, Edwin Hartl's "Not Any More—Memories from Hungary", which appeared in *Die Presse* of Vienna on 1 November, where Hartl says that an "interior story" of this sort is not conceivable, but if there happens to be anybody looking for such a story, it can definitely be found in Nádas' "giant compendium." Rüb notices the significance of political events, such as Stalin's death or the revolution of 1956, or the infiltration of the emotional sphere by the power of ideology, but his conclusion—in my view mistaken—is that "in Nádas's world a metaphysics of feeling, a belief in an untouchable emotional core of the human being seems to be the relief from the destructions of a rational, ideological age." *(Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8 October, 1992). Graf's view that a monstrous essay on the dilemma of the body lies behind the *Bildungsroman*, seems to be much more appropriate. He speaks of posture and pathos, of the theatricality of the novel of the Thoenissen memoir, which he considers a mixture of Grand Guignol and Gartenlaube (A family journal that survived from Biedermeier times): "Even where the language is unintentionally comical—particularly in the chapter 'The Nights of Our Secret Pleasure'—it has the crucial function of disclosure. Nádas turns the secret life of the Wilhelmian bourgeoisie into the chamber of horrors of *Sex and Crime*, in which the cruel tone of our century merges with the obsessive inhibitions of the *Gründerzeit* in a unique and strange way."

The novel's relativization of sexual roles, hermaphrodite at times and androgynous at others, is another topic of the reviews. Uta Goridis's "1300 Pages of Solitude" (*TIP*, November 1991), is a Freudian interpretation which, if applied to the whole of the novel, is probably a misinterpretation. It is a limited, only psychologically valid, explication of the protagonist's character—a character of metaphysical sense and significance. In addition to the polymorphous-perverse paradisical state of childhood, Goridis speaks of the ir-

regularity which cannot be identified with homosexuality in its clinical sense, which maintains the dynamics of emotions and prevents their domestication. In fact, a paradoxical triumph of the novel is that this interpretation holds as well, if not for the final result, but for a layer of the composition: "The father exercized mental as well as physical repression by prohibiting all bodily contact to the little boy. The boy eventually feels that any desire to touch his father must be unnatural. The feeling of mourning, caused by the loss of the father's body, will stay with him forever. The family hides bodily defects, such as the mother's breast surgery, the grandfather's epileptic fits or his small sister's brain damage, with such skill that even the little boy gets entangled in this net of lies which paralyses his mind and instincts." The "dilemma of the body" can be given a content very different from the clinical case described above, but it is fitting for the encyclopaedic element of the novel that Nádas's work can accommodate this interpretation *as well.*

I have used this last example to emphasize that one is not necessarily looking for solutions, and least of all for the single possible solution in these reviews. When considering how a book familiar to us is decoded abroad, one must be prepared for the unexpected topicality of interpretation. "Never losing sight of the socialist plan destroying society, Nádas has written an excellent bourgeois novel abut the powerless bourgeois individual, whose powerlessness is paradoxically highlighted by socialism," writes Thomas Schmid. And another, even more striking, passage from the same review: "One of the greatest episodes is an unexpected meeting of the victim of power and his accuser. Fear is followed by accusation, then explanation and finally by complicity. Nobody else has ever shown with such shocking intensity what is becoming lost in our specious chatter about the 'Stasi complex'."

It is the very significance of the work that makes political interpretations possible. György Dalos sees Nádas's book as "the novel of the Eastern-European past", and asserts that at the time of its publication, "it was clear that the collapse of the political order was imminent." I prefer to agree with a German reviewer less familiar with the situation: "Nádas's work, *Book of Memoirs*, is the book and antibook of a period of stagnation in Eastern Europe. The author worked on it for eleven years without the faintest idea that this futureless age was to become past so soon." (Martin Ebel, "The Last Reservation—The Body. Book of Memoirs: A Monumental Novel by Péter Nádas, a Hungarian Author," *Badische Zeitung,* 15 December, 1991).

Hansjörg Graf points out another important aspect of the work: "Nota bene: It would be absurd to talk about Nádas without recognizing the merit of Hildegard Grosche's translation. . . . Without her excellent work this gigantic novel, a major theme of which happens to be mediation and transmittal, could not affect the reader as an organic whole."

Ervin Lázár

The Porcelain Doll

(Short story)

The man seemed familiar. From Dorog perhaps, or maybe the county town. István Jósvai even knew his name—Csurmándi.

Undeniably, Csurmándi emanated power. Self-confidence.

Burning dark eyes above the high wide cheek-bones.

A lock of hair like a bird's wing falling across his brow.

Even his slightly bowed back and round shoulders radiated a kind of vibrant resolve: they were shoulders that supported walls, pillars, the pillars of a new world.

"Friends...everything you see here is yours from now on."

Csurmándi flung his arms wide with a grandiloquent gesture that embraced the farm labourers' dwellings, the stables, the barn, the fields receding into the distance and the leafy crowns of the trees lining the main road, and included beyond question the count's chateau in Pálfa and the mansion in Cece belonging to Kiss, the squire of Rácpácegres.

The people stood in a semi-circle around Csurmándi at "house's end", the southern front of the Middlehouse, where they sometimes gathered in their free time to talk with their backs to the wall but which most often served as a playground for the children, whose bare feet had pounded the clay around house's end as smooth as stone.

No one spoke. You could see they couldn't quite believe him.

Csurmándi was already raising his hand to emphasize what he wanted to say, but he did not have time to say it, for on the outer edge of the gathering Mrs Lajos Bütös began to sob.

"What are you crying for?" asked Csurmándi in irritation.

The woman did not reply, but her blubbering abated a little.

"What you cryin' for, Auntie Juliska?" repeated Junci Balog, as though wanting to translate the question, put in a foreign tongue, into the language of Rácpácegres.

"If only my Rózsika could have lived to see this," sobbed the woman. "Rózsika, my sweet little Rózsika."

Ervin Lázár *has published several volumes of short stories and children's tales.*

"Compose yourself, Mrs Bütös," said Gyula Hujber reprovingly, as one who found such transports of emotion out of place in front of a stranger. "Sad as it may be, no son of man can raise your Rózsika from the dead, and here we would be talking matters of consequence, woman."

"What?" Csurmándi's face heaved and shook, thunderbolts flashed. Zeus' face must have looked so at the moment Pallas Athena burst forth from his brow.

He seemed to push his way through the crowd by force of his eyes alone to come face to face with Mrs Bütös. He stared at the woman for a long time as though wishing to pierce her with his eyes. Mrs Bütös, alarmed, stopped crying.

"How old was Rózsika?"

"Three," whispered the woman, and a terrible hope was awakened within her. "She couldn't breathe, kept choking all the time, poor little mite...Then she stopped breathing altogether. Lay still. Like a porcelain doll, she were...just like a little porcelain doll." "She were" was the way she said it, and no one but a native of Rácpácegres could understand the essence of those words. The lilt of speech is different in Rácpácegres.

A great weight descended upon those present. Words stuck in throats. Man should not tempt God. "If there was something you could do," implored Mrs Bütös in a whisper. She stared at Csurmándi spellbound.

Gyula Hujber was moved to pity. And shame. He shook off the spell and bellowed.

"But Rózsika has been dead these five years!"

He would have continued, but Csurmándi let his ponderous, terrible gaze rest upon him.

"Be quiet," he said, almost inaudibly. "There is nothing we cannot do."

You could hear the blood pounding in their eardrums, the wild mallows stretching taller with a crisp crunchy sound.

"Bring Rózsika here, to house's end, tomorrow at noon!" said Csurmándi, and now there was scarcely any tension left in his voice, as though he were speaking of the most common-place things.

"You mean dig her up?" Mrs Bütös was trembling.

"I made myself clear, didn't I?"

Csurmándi began to walk towards the dilapidated Opel with which he had bumped and jolted his way out to the puszta. But he could not take more than two steps before Mrs Ferenc Császár threw herself at his feet and clasped his knees with arms turned to steel.

"What do you want, woman?"

"What about my Ferkó? My Ferkó too, please, I beg you, sir!"

"Don't you call me sir!" growled Csurmándi, trying to extricate his knees from Mrs Császár's grip. "How old was Ferkó?"

"Fourteen," whispered the woman, and let go of Csurmándi's knees, but did not stand, remained on the ground on her hands and knees, staring up at the man with her head tilted back.

Ferkó Császár drowned in the Sió. They found him days later under Uzd, caught up in some willow-bushes. By that time he was bloated beyond recognition. He was not fit to be moved, but his mother stole the body and had it shipped home in the dark. She even had a headstone put up for him. He was her only son. They say her geraniums withered, her dog lost its teeth and fur, her chickens turned black from her great sorrow.

"Bring your son too," said Csurmándi.

Mrs Császár's face lighted up. Her hair, her eyes, even her dress began to glow. Who would have thought that she was such a beautiful woman? For a while Csurmándi stared at her, astounded, took her by the elbow, helped her to her feet.

You could see it took great effort for him to shake off Mrs Császár's spell. Then he turned towards the people of Rácpácegres.

"Is there anyone else whose child...?"

Mrs István Szotyori cast a sidelong glance at her husband. And, as he remained silent, she spoke up instead.

"Does there have to be a body?"

Csurmándi was about to ask something, but István Szotyori's roar cut him short.

"Shut up, woman! Our son is not dead."

He turned to Csurmándi, lowering his voice.

"There was an explosion, a bomb or such like, and my wife thinks our son died there. When everyone knows our Pisti turned into a bird."

Csurmándi's eyes flitted from face to face.

"A bird?"

"A bird," said István Szotyori.

As though wanting to shoo something away, Csurmándi whisked his hair out of his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Like I said, then!"

He raised his hand, turned, got in the battered old car. The engine came to life with a cough and a splutter. The children, as was the custom in those parts where cars were a rarity, ran after it in the dense white streak of dust as far as the Littlecorner.

Next morning a silent crowd gathered around Rózsika Bütös' grave. The lads—the same lads who had dug her grave and buried her— plunged their spades into the sunken mound.

András Priger stood with his head bowed beside the earth-blackened tip of the wooden cross.

"We shouldn't be meddling with them," he said.

The lads stopped digging, relieved, but only for a second, for Mrs Császár began to shout like one deranged.

"Stop your croaking, you old crow! You're always croaking."

After that not a word was spoken, there was just the sound of the earth crumbling, thudding, thumping as it rose and fell. When the spades scraped against the coffin, their hearts jumped into their mouths. Mrs Bütös stood

wide-eyed and looking like death beside the grave, pressing her crumpled handkerchief to her mouth. The lads lifted the coffin out of the grave and put it down beside the mound of earth. The rotted planks broke and crumbled, the little girl's grave-clothes gleamed through the cracks. They were white as snow. In the enthralled silence Mrs Bütös knelt beside the coffin and lifted the mouldy pieces of wood off her daughter's face. An indescribable hiss of surprise broke from the lips of those standing around her, as if puffs of steam had escaped from several overheated boilers all at once, at first rising into a sharp crescendo, then deepening to become a happy confusion of noise interspersed with laughter. The little girl looked as though she were still alive. As though she had spent not five years, no, not even a minute undergound. The women, as if at a word of command, began to cry. Mrs Bütös went on picking the rotted pieces of wood off Rózsika's face, hands, dress. She did in fact look like a porcelain doll. A faint blush of pink coloured her cheeks, her soft blonde hair stirred in the breeze like freshly washed hair usually does. Her chubby little hands were folded on her breast, the pink of the nails gleaming in a friendly way.

They tackled Ferkó Császár's grave without much ado after that. They got down to the coffin very quickly. It was in such a good state of preservation that they were able to lift off the lid in one piece. Those who had seen Ferkó dead at the time would have preferred to turn their heads to spare themselves the dreadful sight of that terrible distorted face. Their surprise was all the greater when they saw the body. No trace of his watery death remained. Ferkó Császár looked as though he were asleep—as if death by drowning and that willow-bush were all a nightmare.

András Priger was overcome by shame. He thought of Csurmándi with something akin to affection, recalling the burning dark eyes, the bird's wing lock of hair. He was possessed with faith, with an ease and a lightness, as if every part of his worn and weary body were suddenly reborn in the space of a minute, even his blood seemed to be coursing through his veins differently, as if he were eighteen again.

Everyone was overcome with joy, and the sky gleamed unaccustomedly bright and blue.

They were about to start off for home, for it was almost noon, and they were to be at house's end by noon as ordered, when Juci Barabás began to screech that she wanted her mother to be put before Csurmándi too. "Afore him," was the way she said it.

It was no good their telling her that the chance was only given to children.

"If you're not going to help, I'll dig her up with my bare hands," she said desperately.

Mrs Ignác Barabás, née Örzse Holtyán, had died a week before at the age of 62. Unexpectedly, while hanging up her washing. Her death seemed so unnecessary, so premature. Not only because she was young still, but also because she was, as they say, loved by all.

So they decided they would make an exception for Örzse Holtyán.

She, too, seemed as though she were alive still. Down to that deuced hair sprouting from her chin with which she had fought an uneven battle all her life. Juci Barabás gave it a grim glance, for she distinctly remembered plucking it out before her mother was laid to rest. She leaned over her mother so as no one would see and plucked it out again.

"So you won't have to rise with that beastly hair, mother," she whispered.By noon the dead were lying in the designated place. Scorching sunshine poured over them. They looked as though they were sunbathing happily. András Priger even thought he saw a drop of sweat glisten on Örzse Holtyán's face.

The women decked out house's end with flowers and greenery, brought geraniums, sea-onions, tousled asparagus from their windows. And kept staring towards Sárszentlőrinc. That is where the cloud of dust must appear, raised by the battered old Opel.

But it did not appear.

Even though the children ran ahead as far as the Bigcorner, climbed the old maple so as to see it before anyone else.

By then, anyone who wanted to, knew the truth. Gyula Hujber pressed his back against the wall.

Mrs Lajos Bütös began to sob.

"Oh no, no!"

A hairline crack appeared on her daughter's face, starting out from her nostrils towards her forehead and in the other direction towards her ear, spreading and branching until a filigree of cracks covered her face like a cobweb.

The three bodies turned to dust before their eyes.

Mrs Ferenc Császár changed back into an old woman in an instant. Her back bent and bowed.

It had grown dark, great winds screamed and howled above the puszta. The sun did not come up for three whole days.

Translated by Eszter Molnár

Péter Kántor

POEMS

Translated by George Szirtes

What You Need for Happiness

Mi kell a boldogsághoz

Not much when
you think about it
two people
a bottle of wine
a little cheese
salt, bread
a room
window and door
the rain outside
long stems of rain
and, of course, cigarettes.
But in all these evenings
only once or twice perhaps will everything come together
as sweetly as in the great poems of great poets.
The rest is preparation
afterthought
headache
laughing cramps,
it's no go, but you must,
too much, but not enough.

Inventory

Leltár

You left me two shirts:
one for summer, one for winter,
one for spring and one for autumn,
one blue, the other blue.

Péter Kántor *has published five volumes of poems and a volume of poems for children.*

Two shirts and two books:
an In Search of Orpheus,
and a Leaves of Grass,
a Radnóti and a Whitman.

Two shirts and two books.
And a scarf and a cap:
one blue, the other blue.

And two books.
And a Don Giovanni.
And a Bach and a Vivaldi.

Two shirts: two blue ones,
one for summer, one for winter,
one for spring, one for autumn.

How Can I Explain It to You?

Hogy magyarázzam meg neked?

How can I explain it to you?
A man doesn't live so his tooth shouldn't ache.
He doesn't work so he should have money enough to lie on the beach.
Is that really why he works?
Is that why he invented the train, the aeroplane, the spaceship?
Is that really why he invented the train, the aeroplane, the spaceship,
so that he may do still more work? So that he can spend more time lying
on the beach?
Is that why he has his hair cut, so it should grow faster? So he can
have his hair cut the sooner?
And the train journeys? And the flying?
Do you think these are merely stations on the way to the beach?
And when the golden age comes and there's peace in the world and
a universal holiday
will we all stretch out on the Dalmatian beach?
And no one have toothache?
Do you think this is what I dream of when I lie on the divan with my
eyes closed?
Do you?
And who will decypher the cry of the multi-coloured cockatoo?
And why the little red fish keeps quiet in the shallows?
Who will fit together the pieces of things that are forever breaking?
And who will leave everything behind to follow the songthrush of his heart?
Who clings to the mirrored wall of smooth ice?
Who climbs the Himalayas?

Who swims in deeper waters without drowning?
And who dies there more beautifully?
Toot-toot-toot... hoots the steam that lifts the lid.
Do you think I smoke because the golden age might be a long time coming?

Grandmother

Nagymama

For sometime she would take me down to school,
we sat on the trolley like a pair of toddlers,
whenever the bus reached Rottenbiller Street
my grandmother would cackle loudly-proudly
Rotten Billy! Ha-ha! Rotten Billy!
at first I liked it, later I would ask her:
not so loud please, granny, not so loud!

Go to hell, she'd mutter in her English
as she stooped and blundered blindly down the road;
whenever we met we'd be nose to nose before
she recognized me: So it's you, you scamp!
and a smile would light her face up like a lamp.

She had blue eyes, her glasses were thick slabs,
she had a season-ticket for the opera,
she had enormous feet, and scarlet slippers,
and owned a La Fontaine and Vanity Fair,
a house, before the war of course, and later
she had to share a flat in that same house,
and in the loo there was a notice in four colours
admonishing the pupils in four languages:
Ne tirez pas trop fort! —besides all this
a treasury of junk and books, fake pearls,
a scarlet twenty-four piece china tea set,
glass cabinets, fine mirrors, combs, a Larousse,
and she herself as thin as any toothpick,
and she herself as single as my thumb.

Every summer she visited Vienna
complaining there of Pest, in Pest of there,
how she'd gossip of Trafalgar Square,
but grandmother! you've never even been there!...
she stood on the balcony, watched the rain,
"What's going on here!" she would say, with feeling.

New York City Lines

1 (token)

Because I'm alone
it doesn't mean I'm alone.
You are witnesses to this, all of you.

Because I'm not exploring anything
it doesn't mean I'm not exploring anything
even if I'm not exploring anything.

Because it's cold and it's dark,
and I'm not going anywhere,
it doesn't mean that it's cold and it's dark,
and I'm not going anywhere.

Just as when it isn't cold and it isn't dark
and I'm going somewhere,
it doesn't necessarily mean
that it isn't cold and it isn't dark,
and I'm going somewhere.

2 (what's here)

There's
an aeroplane, an airship, a copter,
a forest of houses—a graveyard from above,
four smiling doormen,
countless dogs, children,
a barking siren, a yellow cab,
a Chinese takeaway,
a Korean salad bar,
the house of God,
Mike on Greenwich Avenue,
the White Horse on 8th Avenue,
the Caribbean restaurant with its blue eyed cat.
But no birds.

3 (local)

A little grey round lady between the rails
beside the wall
scurries frightened past watching men,
stops, starts, peeks this way and that—
a lost rat seeking its companions.

4 (September day)

On the corner of 8th Avenue and 14th
a man lies straight across the road.
He does this every day,
every day he waits for the sun to poke through the clouds,
and when it shows and shines on his knee,
he feels good. Better. A September day.

5 (on one knee)

He was kneeling in the subway car,
in front of the door,
blond, in a pair of blue shorts,
under one knee a half empty plastic bottle.
I had to avoid him.

Had he made a bet that he'd be on one knee
or was it just a game?
He had a long broomhandle with him,
and he used this as a lance
aiming at one thing or another.

Perhaps he had a mission.
Perhaps he wanted encouragement.
A kind word.
No one said a kind word.
I got into another car.

6 (Sharons)

I rang up Sharon and had a long talk with her.
It was good, nothing unusual about it, I thought.
Only when I discovered that it wasn't that Sharon but another one
Then I lit a cigarette.
And another.
One cigarette is much like another.
One Sharon is much like another.

7 (counting)

I'm counting the days,
you're counting the days,
the days are counting us.
September 30th. Monday.

8 (black)

Black dolls in a doll shop.
Every one of them is black.
This must be an exaggeration.
This is surely an exaggeration.

9 (Sunday)

I met a man
who said he wants nothing
but to write beautiful poems.
It was Sunday.
An ugly little bulldog was being walked by its owner.
I felt uncomfortable, fidgety.
He went on to say he'd spent the whole morning washing.

10 (mama)

Mommy, buy me a bicycle!
buy me rollerskates!
and when I get home from here
buy me a Central Park!

Sándor Tar

Beyond All That

(Short story)

József had thought that by the time he turned fifty he would be happy, composed and contented, or at least contented. Or at least composed. Some days earlier he had been taken ill at work, had begun to perspire as though he were being cooked, his left hand had grown numb, and his throat muscles had contracted painfully, he told the doctor that he felt as if his heart were being squeezed hard. That he felt dizzy. They sent him home from hospital the same day, provided him with pills and advice, the weary doctor rattled off the usual litany, then told his assistant to please call in the next. József managed to stay in bed for a couple of days, then began getting up more and more often, mooched about in the cramped little flat, could not keep still and could not keep from thinking things, he told the doctor he was jumpy and nervous and the doctor took his blood-pressure and prescribed a tranquillizer. There was a whole pile of pills on the chair beside the bed, various kinds of cola, chewing gum, chocolate, because he had had to give up smoking too, and beer. The cola was too sweet, and so was the chewing gum, József preferred to bite the inside of his cheek instead, and spent hours in front of the window. Then he had a brainwave and went into the factory.

He was about to walk in through the gate like usual but the security man got in his way, what's up, asked József, aren't you going to let me in? A policeman stood some way off, a stocky, dark-complexioned young man, his holster hanging on his hip like they do in films, he was leaning against the wall, his mouth moving slowly. You still working here, then, asked the fat man, of course I am, said József, I'm on sick leave, don't you remember, they took me away in an ambulance. I remember, 'course I remember, but there are so many people leaving nowadays, God alone knows who belongs here and who doesn't, said the security man, frisking József as he spoke. We have to do this on your way in now, you know, he said, running some kind of gadget down the length of his body, front and back. Some lunatic phoned in yesterday that there was a bomb in the store. And, asked József, was there one? Of course not, said the fat

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Sándor Tar *trained as a technician, was employed in industry. He won first prize in a competition for descriptive prose in 1975 and has published several volumes of fiction since then.*

man, they were just having us on. Alright, he said then, and glanced at the policeman, who nodded, off you go, but don't stay too long.

József had taken his pills before leaving and now he felt a little light in the head, as though he were a bit tiddly, the cold wind was almost welcome, he unbuttoned his jacket and still felt warm. He went in through the old office block, this was where the personnel department used to be a long time ago, and he remembered standing here and laughing with his pal Imre, Imre was a great one for a joke, and he made a pun, and they were taken with a fit of uncontrollable laughter, so much so that when their turn came they were sent out of the room and told to come back when they were done. But they were signed on in the end, they agreed to everything, working in shifts, piece-work, they weren't paying much attention, the main thing was to get a place in the workers' hostel, and not to burst out laughing again. The gateway and the porter's cubicle did not look like it did now, at knocking-off time one was practically hemmed in, they sneaked out the ball-bearings by putting them in their gloves and holding their hands up high obediently while they were being frisked. Once they had got them out they always threw them away, they had no use for them, it was just a prank, then they went and sat in the Diófa to have a drink and a laugh. Those were the good times. These days, having so much time on his hands, József thought a lot about the past, it kept invading his thoughts somehow, however hard he tried to think of something different, it all kept coming back again. Here in the lobby for example, the times they had! The music blared, there was dancing in the dining-room and here in the lobby it was pitch dark, there was hardly any room along the walls, there were couples propped against them all around, and the zippers chirred and sang. He had managed to slip into the personnel office and use the table there with... Évi? Gizi? Oblivious of what he was doing, he stopped in the stillness of the afternoon and stared at the single-coated wall, the big bulletin-board fitted with glass that used to be packed tight with current political events, photos from the Hungarian Telegraphic Agency, appeals, notices, proclamations, now there was just a single slip of paper saying that there would be a sale of underwear in the former Young Communist League Club on Friday.

Who knew how many times had he opened the great iron door of the assembly workshop in those thirty-odd years? Through the always gaping lavatory doors came the sharp stench of urine, as it always did, along the corridors up by the wall the pallets, crates packed with fittings, rusty iron rods, all kinds of equipment, rubbish and dust seemed to have been there for all eternity. The need to urinate came upon him suddenly, since he had been taking diuretic pills he had to go more often, and without delay he hurried into the lavatory. They did not use the urinals much, overalls are not like suits, one doesn't bother much with buttons, not that there always are buttons, one simply drops one's pants but here there were always puddles around the porcelain bowls so they preferred to go into the cubicles. These were one and a half metre high unlockable pens with painted iron sheets used as partition walls. It was only when you were sitting on the toilet that you couldn't see or be seen by

your neighbour, even so the partitions had been bored through and painted over many times, well, it takes all kinds to make the world. Most of them don't mess around, just let loose at whatever's before them, couldn't hit a barn door if they tried. József was turning out of the third cubicle in disgust when he remembered that they had found a dead baby here once, one of the girls must have come in here to drop her bundle, said Imre at the time, though God knows why she had to pick the gents'. There's one over here, he heard from the end of the row, this one's clean, and someone stood up in the semi-darkness. József waited patiently in front of the door. Then two boys came in, kicking at the planks all the length of the row, swearing, laughing.

At home he was always afraid he would die and no one would notice. Now as he opened the great iron door of the grinding room and the shrill noise, the quaking of the concrete under his feet, the tepid vapour of air, oil and rotting emulsion and the acrid smell of burning emery discs assailed his senses, he was almost reassured, no harm can come to him here. It was the afternoon shift, he stood for a while in the doorway waiting for his sight to clear, then started off between the two white stripes towards his group of machines. People were bustling about around the machines, they called out to him, he couldn't see them properly from the machines, and his eyes weren't used to the light yet either, so he just waved, turning, and almost collided with someone, Józsi, shouted someone else, a young man with a cheerful face, so you haven't kicked the bucket then, have you? He wore a quilted jacket and a fur cap with earflaps and was pulling a heavy trolley. Dezső, said József, what the hell are you doing? The young man's face was bright red, you surely have a fine high colour, said József, you painting your face now or what? That's right, said Dezső, I paint and powder myself and then we'll go pay a call on the poofs. How goes it with you? You're looking kind of yellow, getting ready to croak, then? They say you had a heart attack. Who, me, said József, no fear, I'm just working round for one. Whoa, said the other, you mustn't kid around about your heart, 'cos it'll break, said József, from laughing, continued Dezső, no, seriously, it's not funny, no, it's hilarious, said József in conclusion, they laughed, patted each other on the back. Listen, old chum, said the boy later, sooner or later we're all going to get heart attacks here. József was not really paying attention, he was listening to the noises around him, he could tell each machine by the sound it made, and he remembered that when he first came it took him weeks until he could make a beeline for his own machine, they often had to go looking for him, and when the old hands sent him to the canteen he used to keep looking back to be sure to find his way back again, but, if you could go by what they said in the Dió or at the hostel, it was no different for the rest, for heaven's sake, Asztalos would say, the place is like a blooming city. They became used to the place in the end, felt at home, pelted each other with worn blunt disks, played hide-and-seek among the machines, and at night always managed to find a place where they could sleep for an hour or so. The lavatories were always occupied by the old hands, but József devised a system of his own: he opened the top of the drum-winder and leaned into the machine

as though he were fixing something and slept a little standing up in the oily fumes without leaning against anything until one day he fell flat on his face onto the concrete and after that never dared to sleep standing up again.

Dezső, in the meanwhile, had continued to speak, yes, yes, nodded József, of course, well, I'll have to be going now, time is running short. Dezső was a boy of twenty or so, endowed with a tool so large he was almost ashamed of it when the others stood around to admire it in the shower, one time Rác and Molnár and someone held him down and kept splashing it with cold water but it wouldn't shrink at all. József remembered that when he first started work it took him about six months or so before he dared to undress before the others, until then he just stripped to the waist and washed that way, keeping his eyes fixed straight ahead, not looking anywhere. Hey, old chum, are you listening, the boy's voice intruded upon his thoughts, when I come back, then, OK? I said, alright, didn't I, mumbled József, he had no idea what they had been talking about, they shook hands on it. József leaned against a concrete pillar, he'd have a cigarette now if he could, his head was buzzing like a hive of bees, probably because of those lousy pills, thought József, well, that's why he should be in bed, by rights. Two girls passed by and smiled, said hello, ducks, how are you doing, doing is right, thought József, I wouldn't mind a bit of doing, but those times are over, he knew them by sight, at one time there was not a hidden corner in the factory that he had not reconnoitred because of the girls, he soon acquired a reputation for being a stud and getting straight to the point, well, there just wasn't time for sweet-talking! You had to hustle, after the shift you went straight to the Dió, then scouted the city in the afternoon or in the morning depending on what shift you were on. You either scored or you didn't. Most often didn't. Then you went on drinking and dreaming at the hostel, or later in your digs. The girls did not dare go up to the hostel, though the janitor was all right, they were afraid of getting gang-banged, which did happen sometimes. They liked it better in the woods, on benches in the park, in empty railway carriages, blindly, in the dark, József once found himself in an empty coal truck, but he didn't realize it until much later, when it got light.

He was feeling a bit better, shook his head a couple of times to clear it, rubbed the area around his heart beneath his windcheater, stamped his feet like he did at night to stay awake. The ball-bearing grinders swayed and undulated just a couple of steps away, watch, his foreman had told him a long time ago, it's just like women swinging their hips, and he imitated the motion with his bony ass on which the pants, tied up with a bit of black stranded wire, hung loose. József was eighteen then, and had no intention of getting a heart attack, not even working round for one. Where can the old man have got to? Last year he still dropped in from time to time, selling lottery tickets, picking up bits of iron, discarded rings and so on, and putting them in his enormous pockets, which were always turned out at the gate, he just laughed, and the supervisors laughed too, ha ha, said the old man, that was just the bait, you'll never find what I'm really taking out. He never took out anything. They say the security men lost their temper once, made him strip, even stuck a bit of cold iron up his

ass, he took exception to that. Son, he kept telling József, why don't you marry my daughter, she isn't a looker, but she's healthy and strong and you're like a bull, at least she'd get some fun out of life. The girl was a lawyer in Budapest, the old man arranged a rendezvous once at his flat, she was a thin, pale woman, then somehow they were alone, the only thing that bothered József was that she kept smoking even while they were doing it. On another occasion József had the old man's wife up against the gas stove, she was a plump, appetizing woman, but it didn't quite come off. Give her a baby, said the old man once, they were sitting in the Dió, talking about his daughter again, knock her up, then she won't have no choice, will she? He was drunk, in the end he confessed tearfully that he had always wanted a son like József, not one of these scholarly types, and the next day he didn't remember a word of what he'd said.

Further off beneath the windows were a couple of tables with benches, the Hilton the workers called it, József watched the sunbeams filtering through the grimy windows in which dust-motes danced, splotches of grease and water glistened on the lino-covered tables, it did not last for long, the sun hid behind a cloud and everything became grey again. The tables and benches had come into the workshop as a result of a new health regulation only recently, they were great for napping on but there were far fewer of them than sleepy men, so no one used them, and anyway, the shift bosses would have peached on them for sure. Sometimes when someone was taken sick, they were made to lie down on one of the tables, and the youngsters went to any lengths to make sure the area was always dark, they even smashed the neons, but finally they ended up by sending whoever's turn it was under the table while the rest sat on the benches swinging their legs. This happened in the afternoons rather than in the evenings, at night everyone tried to grab a bit of shut-eye when they couldn't keep their eyes open any longer. József was just about to sit down, he was feeling weak and it was time to take a pill when he caught sight of Aunt Máli. The white-haired woman was washing coffee-cups at the sink. József came up to her from behind and slapped her on the back, Aunt Máli looked up, not too fast, not too slow, just looked up. Józsi dear, she said then, smiling, so you came in! Máli was on familiar terms with everyone, including the manager, rumour had it that she had been present when the navvies were digging the foundations and had been there ever since. No one knew exactly how old she was, not even in personnel, I'm still here because no one's remembered to send me away, she sometimes said. She used to be pretty and a friendly sort once, used to clean in the hostel, the boys leched after her, especially when they came in tipsy and all keyed up after a no-score night, but Máli was not there for the taking, she did the choosing after her own fashion, and sooner or later everyone took their turn.

Two rainbows began to vibrate before József's eyes, he could barely see, but it had happened before and it never lasted long. He sat down, Aunt Máli said something and he suddenly remembered that you always had to eat stewed fruit or bite into a lemon when you went to Máli's, because she used to say its terrible the way you stink of booze, boy. Her wash was strung up on a thick

string in her room, hanging like bats, and it was always warm. She told every one of them in turn that they were her only love and not to tell anyone. The boys sometimes wanted to try something extra but Máli insisted on what she was used to, refused to experiment, and this was what József remembered now as he looked into her face and she in his. It was Attila, an angel-faced, fair-haired boy, an unholy skirt-chaser and former room-mate, who opened József's eyes to Máli, they were drunk and barged into Máli's stripped naked but she didn't even let them in, this happened around Christmas, everyone else had gone home. Then the fair-haired boy said that he didn't fancy the old hag smelling of disinfectant anyway, they could do without her, he and József, just fine. József just laughed, they were drinking vermouth and Attila spilled some of it on him, it trickled all over, let me lick it off you, pleaded the boy, go on, I'll be your baby calf, then you can have a go. The next day József could not stop washing, and after that it was no good Attila offering him drinks or trying anything else, not long after the disk blew up in his machine, he was blinded in one eye, they picked the granules out of his face and neck by the thousand. They say he committed suicide when he first saw his face in the mirror.

Do you want a cup of coffee, asked Máli, and straightened her thick spectacles, no, no, said József, I'm not allowed to drink coffee, I just dropped in, said József, for a look round. You're not looking so good, said the woman, looking him straight in the eye and wiping her hands on her dress, I don't fancy your colour, she added. That's only natural, said József hurriedly, I'm sick, but old Máli just grunted, then pointed at her head, that's where your trouble is, József did not say anything. Your wife's here, said old Máli later, she's on the afternoon shift. Málika love, Jutka isn't my wife anymore, said József patiently, and you know it. The old woman made a gesture of dismissal, in my eyes she'll always be your wife, you youngsters never know what you're doing, no discrimination, and then you're sorry afterwards. József did not answer, he was feeling weak again, he would have liked to sit awhile but it wouldn't be any good with Máli there, his brain throbbed and he thought it was stupid of him to have come in, he'd end up getting sick again.

The trouble, whatever the lawyer said, was not that their child was born deaf and dumb, the trouble began much earlier, they had both of them been single and independent far too long, and with the marriage they had been driven into a housing estate cage where József wanted to put Led Zeppelin on to the tape deck at full blast and Jutka wanted to listen to the Bee Gees, and the neighbours were always kicking up a fuss, and neither of them wanted to take down the rubbish, and they never had enough money for anything. József tried everything he could think of, he moonlighted as a porter for a while, then leased a bit of land with three rows of apple-trees, then they were into mushroom-growing, then nutrias for a while but nothing seemed to turn out right, the days became more and more disillusioning, only their nights together were wonderful, then not even those. Jutka cheated on him with a machine-setter, and he began chasing the girls from purchasing, only neither of them could decide who had started it. Anyway it was good grounds for the divorce.

Jutka went back to her mother with the child and suddenly they had both grown old.

There was a shorter way to the mass production line through the workshop store, József opened the door, at one time this was where the wash-tanks were, this was where he brought Jutka, yes, said the girl, turning to face him at the table, she was so beautiful József lost heart, he just caressed her face and did not speak. Was there anything else you wanted to say, asked the girl later, which had made them both laugh, and it was over. Later, just a few days later, it happened, there on the table, the ventilator whooshing above them, the reset rings on the shelves shaking softly, and half the shift outside the locked door shouting and cheering them on and beating on the door, but they didn't hear a sound, whispering petrol-scented sweet nothings into each other's half-open mouths, like always and for ever. The wedding was more like a party than anything else, all young people, they drank and danced, József was happy, Jutka was beautiful, and nothing else counted. He even remembered accidentally flopping down into the bowl in which the punch was cooling, they laughed at everything and even the wedding night was different, by dawn the noise had abated, they switched off all the lights, József determinedly took his love to bed and on the other beds, in the armchairs, on the rugs the other boys did the same. It was a great party, they spoke about it for years.

József sensed that he had no control over his thoughts though he was still aware of where he was, he saw Ácsjóska who was unravelling a sweater of sorts with great ingenuity, the spindle of the machine was reeling the yarn into a skein, he shook hands with him, and saw that Takács's machine was shaking irritably, he knew at once that the revs per minute were set too high and said so, he shook hands with him too, the others came and stood around, Dezső appeared again, then the foreman on duty, they talked, I have to sit down, said József, the pill's beginning to work, it's alright, he added, it always gets me this way but it doesn't last long. Dezső took him into the foreman's office, at last József was able to sit down, he took out a pill and put it under his tongue. Would you like a drink of water, asked Dezső, and József looked at him the way he always did when someone asked him a question like that, the boy laughed. Go fetch Jutka, said József later, tell her there's a letter for her. A telephone call. Whatever. Dezső slapped him on the shoulder and went out.

József looked up, a spider's web of angle-irons, mountings and bracings criss-crossed the roof-timbers of the vast workshop, smoke billowed high up near the ceiling and it was almost dark. Here he had lived his life, or most of it, in this noisy, dirty place, the rest was short-lived, transitory, hurried confusion from shift to shift, for a moment he felt as though he had just woken up, he even blinked a couple of times, screwing up his eyes, on the wall opposite an old, frayed poster showed the brightly-coloured fairy-tale scene of some distant place radiating serenity, tranquility, silence, boundless horizon, a little house, trees, shrubbery in the foreground and somewhere, in the distance, the sea. There's no such place anymore, he thought. Somewhere behind the house there's got to be a pile of junk, rusty, leaking barrels full of chemicals awaiting

final destruction and among dessicated clumps of sparse grass puddles of oil gleaming with a blueish sheen. He closed his eyes and waited.

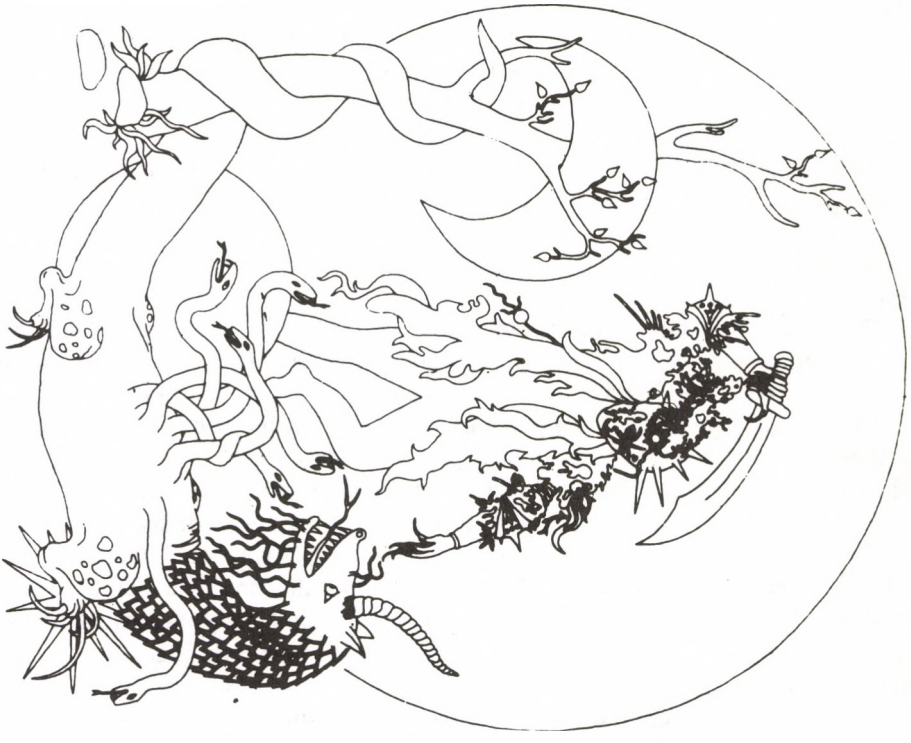
Are you alright, he heard the voice say, for a long time he did not reply, savouring the lilt of the voice, then he opened his eyes. Jutka was standing beside him, straight-backed and slender, as though she were not past forty at all, only the tiny crow's feet around her eyes belied her years, the cracks of time, thought József, and cast his eyes over the familiar face, the Gypsy-like brown skin, the clean-cut, closed mouth, the greying but still unruly crown of black hair. You've grown ugly, he told her, smiling. Thanks, said the woman, and you've grown so pretty. Such a pretty shade of yellow, with a hint of green here and there like death. Was this why you wanted to see me? József leaned back in his chair, listen, he said, I've had this wonderful idea. And what would that be, asked Jutka, not showing too much interest. What I thought was, said József, what if we got married again? Aha, said Jutka, slowly pulling the rubber gloves off her hands, well, I'm going, and if you've really got something to say then let me know. Wait, shouted József, panick-stricken, and stood up, you can't just leave me here like this, just listen to me! We messed things up but it's not too late, how's the kid? The same, said Jutka, what did you expect. József began to speak, slowly at first, then more quickly, he could feel his head clearing, I know a place, he said then, I saw it last week, we could sell the flat and go there, I've got everything planned. Is it far, asked Jutka suddenly, very far, said József, a big white house in a clearing in a wood, the sun is always shining there, and there's such a silence, we can take the kid, you don't have to talk there, we can point and use signs, just imagine, we can do whatever we like... József continued to speak though the woman had been gone for some time, he just went on, saying that if she didn't fancy the place in the woods, they could go even farther, someplace beside water if she wanted, then he sat down. I've gone off my head, he said softly, Dezső was standing in the door, what's up, old chum, feeling better? Oh, yes, he said, much better. Couldn't be better, in fact. Got a fag?

Well, said the foreman, I'd like you to pass your gear over to Dezső here, it might be some time before you can get back to work and he's ready to jump in for you, there's a lot of work to be done right now and I can't take on anyone from the outside. What, said József, there's nothing the matter with me, I'm just a bit weak still from the pills. The foreman did not reply at once, Ácsjóska practically buried himself in his machine, Takács was fumbling in his locker and the others were all wandering around, only Dezső was there beside him, but did not look at him. Didn't you tell him, asked the foreman, looking at the boy. Of course I did, said Dezső, I explained it to you when you came in, he said, turning to József, don't you remember? When we were standing by the ball-bearings? József stared straight ahead into the air, he did not understand anything. Then he understood. Look, said the foreman, this sickness of yours might drag on, you can't expect us to stand here at attention until you come back, they may even pension you off, in fact if I were in your place that's what I'd insist on, things being what they are. It's a perfect opportunity, your being

sick. You don't mind, do you, old chum, asked Dezső while they were clearing out the locker. Of course not, said József, why should I mind? You'll find my wife's here too. She likes to be tickled under her ear. The boy stared at him for a while, then wiped his nose on the sleeve of his jacket and began to walk towards the exit. József wanted to call after him, to ask him where he was going, there was the receipt to sign and the padlock with the key to be handed over but he could not see him any longer, he had disappeared behind the machines in the clouds of smoke, he felt weak again and had to lean against the lockers and felt himself slipping.

It was getting dark when he walked out of the factory gates. The city was swaying like a ship, then it seemed as if there were flames above the houses. I hope you burn, he muttered, all of you.

Translated by Eszter Molnár



Flórián Mézes

The Media War

A war of words, party strife, press battles, parliamentary and legal debates has been going on for some time but the media war in Hungary have recently passed to a new stage. A member of parliament in the ruling coalition, a medical practitioner at that, went on hunger strike in support of the demand that the Chairmen of Hungarian Radio and Television, respectively, be removed from office. To be more precise, the demand is that the President of the Republic sign the order of demission as formally submitted by the Prime Minister. To my knowledge there is no precedent anywhere for someone to take such desperate action just because he does not agree with a decision regarding appointments to high public office. It is also unique that the person concerned should be a member of parliament, someone with many opportunities inside and outside of Parliament to air his views.

Whatever the motives of this member of parliament, whether a desire for the limelight or the meagre prospects for a political solution, the hunger-strike confirms that the media war in Hungary, which started as a dispute over property rights, has turned into a focus of political crisis. The economic aspects have fallen into oblivion.

There is no real agreement on when the war broke out. Some maintain that it was when members of the government and of the governing parties started to object to radio and television programmes. It was stated that government activities were presented in a prejudicial way, from the point of view of the opposition, in a manner that spread gloom and pessimism. The time is put to the summer of 1991, when the chairmen of the radio and of television appeared before the Cultural Committee of the House, and government members rehearsed their objections, or alternatively to the autumn of 1991, when the leader in the House of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) declared in a memorandum, that was leaked to the press, that the government and the government parties would have to secure positions of strength—not closely defined—in the two national media. Hostilities were under way when the government decided to appoint vice-chairmen to the two electronic media and the President refused to

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sign the appointments. Agreement was reached later on appointing other persons. Still others date the outbreak much earlier, to the summer of 1990 when, after prolonged debate, a consensus of the six parties represented in parliament (three in the government coalition, three in opposition) was reached and two prominent independent sociologists, Csaba Gombár and Elemér Hankiss, were appointed as chairmen of Hungarian Radio and of Hungarian Television, respectively—offices which they still currently hold.

Others again go back to the autumn of 1989, to the round table discussions that prepared for the change of regime. Participants, the then ruling Communist Party, and various opposition groups, mostly parties now represented in parliament or trades unions, wished to ensure the neutrality of the Hungarian News Agency (MTI) and of radio and television in the elections that were to be held in March-April 1990. Although no agreement on the management of the media was then reached, the reform communist government of the time, in a surprise move, put a consultative body in charge which in the event, apart from making a few appointments, did not interfere in the management of the media. As it were as an *obiter dictum,* the participants at the round table also agreed that, until a Media Act was passed, there would be no new television channels or radio stations, that Hungarian radio and television would continue, without competition, as national media. This was dubbed the frequency moratorium and still holds. As a result every shade of political opinion fights for a place (programmes) within the radio (three stations) and the television (two channels) programmes, and accuses them of bias in one direction or another.

In my own view the media war in Hungary started not one or two, or even three years ago but in 1988, when a number of new local—largely oppositional—papers were licensed to appear alongside the government (Communist Party) owned press. At that time the media war was what it really should be, a battle between the new and the old papers for the market, for readers. Elements of this fight appeared at that time in the national press as well. *Reform,* the first unashamed tabloid for over forty years, appeared; radio and television saw programmes of a more or less oppositional nature being broadcast, while editors and producers, silenced for years, were given programmes of their own again.

The inability to retain complete control over the electronic media was one of the signs that the communist dictatorship was going soft. Until then—on paper, until the summer of 1989—any new periodical had to be licensed by the Information Bureau attached to the Council of Ministers. The ultimate decision was that of the Communist Party, and even in 1986 and 1987 a large number of applications for such licenses were refused. The national media were managed in much the same way but, owing to their greater importance, kept on a shorter leash. Thus the Information Bureau appointed the editors of papers and periodicals, but the Central Committee of the Communist Party appointed the heads of the News Agency, of the Radio and of Television; to be mere exact, they rubber stamped what the competent party secretary and a few leading party officials proposed. This extended far beyond key appointments, right

into day to day management. The phone rang frequently, over which high party officials issued their orders and prohibitions regarding particular programmes. The same motive was behind fortnightly conferences of newspaper editors. Those in charge of the media thus always knew what was wanted. Around 1987 the situation changed when top party leaders began to issue instructions that contradicted each other. This affected most sensitively those in charge of the electronic media. Although it was in these media that inteference was most direct, the fact that those in power were no longer sure of themselves was evident in the temper of the tellings off and the instructions given at conferences.

Thus new licenses for papers and periodicals and new programmes on the electronic media were tangible evidence of the softening of the power structure. Within a matter of two years the printed media in Hungary mushroomed. At present, according to reliable data, three thousand papers and periodicals are published in Hungary. (One cannot be sure of their exact number since many start or cease publication without any announcement.) New national papers were generally founded by powerful foreign press barons. After 1989 Berlusconi, Maxwell, Murdoch, Servan-Schreiber, Hersant, Ferenczy, Springer and others all put in an appearance in Hungary. Local papers, however, were generally underfinanced and published by opposition parties and groups and associations of citizens. In 1988 and 1989 they had only to publish information which had earlier reached the public through the bush telegraph or samizdat to offer serious local competition to the county paper that had once enjoyed local monopoly. This advantage lasted up to the 1990 elections, in which here and there local papers played an important part. But their shortage of finance soon told, especially after foreign interests devoured the old county papers. In 1989 and 1990 Springer alone succeeded in gaining control over seven county papers; at present only two of the nineteen are not at least partially foreign owned. With the change of ownership—the county papers had all belonged to the publishing house of the Communist Party—the affiliation of the papers also changed, which made things even more difficult for the small papers trying to compete with them.

It was there and then that the present—political—nature of the media war appeared. The chief accusation levelled in the attack was that of 'selling-out the property of the nation'. It soon became apparent, however, that there was more to it than simply damaging the national interest. Local power interests shaped up against each other. Journalists on the strangled local papers and local politicians soon woke up to the fact that the majority of those who headed these foreign owned papers now revived, were the old party hands that had been in charge in communist times and that the party publishers of old had metamorphosed into the managers of the new limited companies that owned them. Bearing in mind that these papers—under new ownership but still run by the old guard—tended to be in favour of the opposition after the 1990 elections, the political debate over them divided on government coalition parties versus opposition parties right from the start.

As regards the national press, it soon became obvious that papers controlled

by Marquart, Maxwell or Murdoch tended—and to an ever more marked degree—to be oppositional; those taken over by Servan-Schreiber, on the other hand, are inclined to support the government. Accusations occasionally made by government supporters, particularly in the weekly *Magyar Fórum* which is close to the Hungarian Democratic Forum, the leading party of the government coalition, and in the daily *Új Magyarország* that is reckoned to be—and proclaims itself to be—the government's mouthpiece, that these foreigners, or one or other of them, are intent on overthrowing the government, indeed democracy as such, do not hold water. Nevertheless there is no doubt that the majority of the partially foreign owned papers generally support the opposition.

The political debate degenerated into outright hostilities when the government—or rather, the dominant party in the government colition—lacking the press support it felt it needed, decided to create a paper or papers of its own. The first round was fought between journalists, one move being the founding of a new journalists' association. Noted opponents within the profession had for some time used the press to fire across each other's bows, and their conflicts obviously had their effect on national politics, the more so since *Új Magyarország*, the new daily which enjoyed government patronage, was only progressing slowly towards a circulation that befitted a national daily. According to figures published by the economic weekly *HVG* on August 22nd 1992, the highest circulation (315,000) was enjoyed by the socialist *Népszabadság*, founded by the Kádár regime in 1957. (It didn't even feel the necessity to change its name.) It was followed by *Népszava* (135,000), the trade union paper, then by *Kurír* (120,000) founded in 1990, that tended to support the opposition, *Mai Nap* (104,000) of a similar colouring, the opposition *Magyar Hírlap* (75,000) which was part of the Maxwell empire while that lasted, *Magyar Nemzet* (70,000) that could be said to support the government and *Esti Hírlap* (70,000), an evening paper. The circulation of *Új Magyarország*, the government paper, was estimated around 50,000. The paper itself refused to supply figures.

The publication of government papers also brought out into the open that internecine war which various radio and television production teams had been waging against each other. Thus the teams producing Sunday News—an early morning programme on radio—the early evening television news, Week and Panorama, the first concentrating on domestic, the second on foreign stories on television, felt ostracized within the radio and television community because of their programmes already in 1990. Conflict turned into open hostility when the two media chairmen, appointed in the summer of 1990, started to shift programme times, reallocated budgets and even terminated programmes. The production teams which supported the government—in a virtual minority—interpreted all this as an attack on themselves, although it must be said that, in television at least, just about every programme was affected by restructuring.

At first hostilities were confined to the media themselves. True enough, the Parliamentary Cultural Committee discussed the political bias of the electronic media but they confined themselves to offering good counsel. Things turned more serious when the writer István Csurka, a Member of Parliament and one

of the vice-chairmen of the MDF, suggested that some of the moneys the budget had allocated to television for 1992 be frozen, since television was not "sufficiently in the service of the nation". The Cultural Committee, both government and opposition members, did not support the motion but the House, in plenary session, voted that 1,000 million forints be temporarily withheld. In 1991, the radio had received 1,400 million forints from the exchequer, and television 6,900 million forints. At the same time, the government endeavoured to appoint journalists whom both public and press held to be government supporters as vice-chairmen of the radio and television respectively. The Prime Minister, after taking legal advice and relying on a 1974 decision by the then government, argued that the government—in other words the premier himself—was the employer of the two electronic media. The chairmen of radio and television, on the other hand, maintained that this does not follow from currently valid legislation. In other words, the head of the government had no right to interfere regarding staffing or organizational questions. The President of the Republic, who formally makes the appointments, did not approve, but agreed to new candidates proposed by the Prime Minister. Meanwhile, the Head of State (and his supporters) and the Head of the Government (and his supporters) engaged in bare-knuckled legal skirmishes.

All this added fuel to the fire. In an atmosphere of mounting hostility, at the Prime Minister's request, the Parliamentary Cultural Committee asked the chairmen of the two electronic media to appear before it, to decide if they were fit to occupy their posts and, if not, to recommend their dismissal. Those concerned presumed that the outcome had been decided beforehand. The chairman of Hungarian Radio walked out after making his statement, thus refusing to submit himself to questioning. At the hearings, in addition to the allegations of the two media not serving the national interest and national culture, charges of financial misconduct were also made—and refuted. The Committee voted for dismissal and the Prime Minister then submitted his recommendation to the President, who refused to sign the dismissals. The Prime Minister then sought a ruling from the Constitutional Court but that body does not decide particular concrete cases but merely interprets the constitution. Both the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic argued that the Court's judgement favoured his own position. In this stand-off position both sides expect a Media Act to provide a solution. This would clarify the legal status of the national or public interest media, along with the roles of parliament, the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister in controlling them. The Constitutional Court, in the same spirit, named the end of November as the deadline for the enactment of such a Media Bill, arguing that an unconstitutional situation prevailed until this happened.

At the time of writing, the media war is still an undecided tie. The government entrusted a State Secretary in the summer with negotiating a consensus between the President and the Parliamentry Cultural Committee (in fact its opposition members) to hasten the Media Act on its way. The end of November deadline looks unrealistic. Early in September the Parliamentary Cultural Committee

had still got nowhere with the draft bill, and until they finish their deliberations, parliament with its hands full of more vital legislation anyway, cannot even start discussing it in plenary session. At present the legislators are still mutually accusing each other of breaking the agreement on principles reached at the time of the national round table, or else of the six party agreement concluded early this year which, in essence, decided that either independent or parliamentary bodies would control the two national media, rigorously excluding the possibility of control by any single party.

Until legislation settles the situation for good or ill, the media will obviously continue as both the arena and the bone of contention of the political struggle.

The following are key issues. Ownership questions have not been clarified. In the absence of legislation, it is not clear who should manifest the national will in media which are designated as national: the government of the day, parliament as a whole, or a supervising body which is independent of both, though under parliamentary control. The trouble is that parties, groups, and individual politicians, who declare themselves the true trustees of the nation, have declared that the two media—with the exception of a few programmes—and their whole management structure, particularly their chairmen, do not serve or, rather, work against, the national interest.

Some of them went as far as proposing revolutionary methods, and demonstrations against the radio or television (and their chairmen) take place with increasing frequency. In 1989-90 there was no need of a revolution, the Communist Party simply collapsed and by the 1990 elections had long ceased to be the target, so these people want to rehearse a 'revolution'. The demonstrators, in imitation of 1956, on one occasion insisted that their proclamation be broadcast by a radio they describe as 'treasonable', a 'communist nest.'

Not only the rhetoric and the methods were identical, but some leaders and organizers of the demonstrations were also '56 veterans, who had suffered much because of this under the Kádár regime.

One of their demands is that those who served the previous regime be removed; yet the journalists—on both sides—had been journalists earlier as well. In fact only the most prominent and servile of those who served the previous regime have disappeared from the scene. The accusation that a "saving of positions" took place is therefore well-founded. It is, however far from clear who could possibly replace those in charge of the media, or for that matter, business and industrial management either. Experienced people, possessing the necessary professional and management skills, are simply not available in sufficient numbers.

To end the media war, both sides will have to show considerable wisdom and a mutual willingness for compromise.

Patricia Molnár

Unemployment: The Hard Facts

At the end of June 1992, preliminary figures on employment show that those registered as unemployed had reached the psychologically critical 10 per cent mark.

Forecasts for the rest of the year see this figure rising from 530,000 at the end of May to 700,000, and even 900,000 by 1993. That mass unemployment should take place in Hungary within a very short time is a source of conflicts, personal problems and tensions in legislation. After the Second World War, the actual concept of unemployment was only officially recognized as applying to Hungary as late as on January 1st, 1989—that is, a mere four years ago—when the government introduced unemployment benefits. It goes without saying that unemployment had existed in the Hungarian economy before 1989, but in a very peculiar form. Every Hungarian citizen had the right to a job and this created full employment, which made the politicians happy. This often meant that anything from two to four people did a job that could have been managed by one. At present some firms are compelled to lay off staff to stay solvent, others have become insolvent and everyone loses their job. Earlier unemployment had been concealed under the old system, in which inefficient work was coupled with low incomes. In fact, incomes were so low in the second half of the 80s, that many Hungarians were forced to supplement them by working in the second economy, doing what amounted to a second day's work after they had finished their main job. Concealed unemployment was paid for by much longer working hours. Unemployment relief was wholly financed by the exchequer until July 1st 1991; following growing budgetary deficits and a drastic increase in the number of the jobless, what was called the "solidarity contribution" was introduced.

The solidarity contribution is paid by both firms and employees, just as in the highly developed industrial states. In 1991, it amounted to 1.5 per cent of gross wages for firms and 0.5 per cent for employees. Bearing in mind that the contribution was introduced in the middle of the year, the total comes to 8,000 million forints. This, together with 9,000 million forints originally allocated from the state budget, makes up the Solidarity Fund for the relief of the unemployed, a total of 17,000 million forints, just over $200 million. Even at the time the contribution was introduced, it was obvious that these levies of 1.5 and 0.5 per cent would not be enough; ammendments soon followed. Parliament decided on 21st December 1991, that from 1992, employers were to pay 5 per cent, more than three times the original percentage, and employees 1 per cent (twice the original rate). At the same time, parliament tightened unemployment benefit regulations on several major points: thus the maximum duration of the benefit was reduced from two years to one and a half years. The maximum benefit was also reduced from three times the

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legal minimum wage to not more than twice the minimum wage (now set at 8,000 forints); currently 16,000 forints is the maximum allowable unemployment benefit. Furthermore, the December legislation laid down that those receiving severance pay are not entitled to unemployment benefit for a certain time, depending on how many months of their average salary had been received in severance pay. The legislation hampers those of the unemployed who wish to go into business for themselves; indeed, the notorious difficulty in obtaining loans in Hungary makes this a pipe-dream anyway.

In mid-1992, only end of May figures were available at local employment centres. The number of the unemployed was 522,700 at that time, which means a 20,600 (4.1 per cent) increase over the previous month. In comparison with the May 1991 figure—186,000 jobless—the number of unemployed had thus virtually tripled. Last year the number of unemployed grew by 14.6 per cent a month on average; thus, it is a favourable tendency that in January 1992, the increase was only 9 per cent a month—in February, 2.7, in March, 5.1, in April, 5 per cent. This is due to the beginning of seasonal—agricultural and catering—jobs. Another favourable change is that this year the number of registered vacancies increased every month, as opposed to the trend observed last year. This is mainly due to the gradual development of employment centres, which are investing much effort in the exploration of vacancies. However, this does not mean an improvement in the chances of the unemployed of finding a job, since demand and supply rarely coincide in location or skills. In May, for instance, merely 3.7 per cent of the unemployed found a satisfactory job. Although the jobless seize every chance, there are only 4 jobs offered per 100 unemployed.

There are powerful regional differences. The situation is still best in Budapest, where unemployment is at 4.1 per cent, less than half the national average. The employment situation is relatively good in the Western part of Hungary. Győr-Moson-Sopron county has an unemployment rate of 6.6 per cent, Vas county one of 6.7 per cent. The situation of the jobless in these counties is improved by the fact that some of them are able to find seasonal or possibly long-term moonlighting work in neighbouring Austria. The situation is much more critical in the East in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, unemployment was 17.9 per cent in May; there is much tension in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county as well, where the rate of unemployment is 16.3 per cent, and where the metallurgy and mining and engineering industries—the industrial citadels of socialism—are all in deep depression. Nógrád county has a 15.9 per cent unemployment rate. The problem is worsened by the fact that in some districts in the aforementioned counties, rates of 24-26 per cent have been registered. This means that practically every family is affected by unemployment in one way or another.

These figures also indicate the changes in the economic structure of the country. Those regions where metallurgy, mining and agriculture were significant, now have to face problems that are more serious than the average, because of the crisis in these sectors and because of the collapse of many giant firms. Such regions are Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Nógrád counties. The economically least developed region of Hungary, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county has problems of its own. Many of its inhabitants—often unqualified—were forced to seek employment away from home. Many of them found jobs in Budapest, as unskilled construction workers. Now that there is practically no major state investment, and only the very best firms can afford to build offices, and housing construction has declined drastically, building firms

are in a slump. Regional unemployment data show that structural changes in favour of services are characteristic mainly of those regions where the economy was already well-developed, that is, of Budapest and the Western border areas.

Men and women are affected by unemployment to a different extent, 41 per cent of the unemployed being women, 59 per cent men. In this period, it is mainly manual workers who have been made redundant; they constitute 84 per cent of the registered unemployed, as compared to 16 per cent of clerical and white-collar workers. Of the manual workers hit by unemployment, 40 per cent are skilled, 28 per cent semi-skilled and 32 per cent unskilled. Half of the unemployed are under thirty-five. The chances of a 25-year-old skilled turner in North-Eastern Hungary of finding a job are almost nil, whereas a 40-year-old female programmer in Budapest will not really be touched by unemployment.

The unemployed are entitled to unemployment allowances, early retirement; there is an unemployment benefit for school leavers and refunds for various costs. All these are set out in employment legislation. An unemployed person is defined by legislation as somebody who had earlier worked but cannot find employment because of changes on the labour market. An unemployed school leaver is a young person who has completed his or her full-time studies not more than one and a half years earlier as a student in secondary school or a higher education institution, and who has not succeeded in finding employment for over 3 months.

Those seeking employment and willing to cooperate with employment agencies, but not offered an appropriate job by the local employment centre, are entitled to an allowance or early retirement. According to the law, employment is appropriate if it accords with the skills of the unemployed individual, if there are no health grounds preventing the individual from taking up the job, if the salary offered is not less than the unemployment allowance, and if the daily journey to and from work does not exceed three hours. In the case of a woman with a child under ten—or a man bringing up a child under ten as a single parent—the daily travelling time cannot exceed two hours.

Unemployment benefit also depends on the number of contributions paid, there being a link between them and the length of the period in which benefit can be paid. (Under present rules, this period cannot exceed 540 days.) However, since the payment of contributions only became obligatory on July 1st 1991, the length of the period of employment will —temporarily—be the grounds on which unemployment benefit is assessed and paid. Unemployment benefit based on average salary is paid in two stages: in the first, the unemployed individual is entitled to 70 per cent of the base, the previous average salary, in the second stage this falls to 50 per cent. There are lower and higher limits; the allowance cannot be less than the current minumum wage (presently 8,000 forints) and it cannot be more than double this (16,000 forints). However, if, when calculated over a period, the average salary concerned is less than the legal minimum wage, unemployment benefit is calculated on the basis of average income. The unemployed person who has occasional employment or has an income from other sources (e.g. renting a flat), is still entitled to unemployment benefits if the monthly income concerned does not exceed the current minimum wage. At present, the system has no proper controls over income from moonlighting and widespread evasion of this rule is suspected.

Considering the high rate of inflation, the high incidence of benefits fraud is not surprising.

Of the 530,000 odd jobless registered in May 1992, somewhat more than

430,000 obtained any kind of unemployment relief, and the average came to 8,586 forints per month. This is subject to income tax and a 5 per cent pension contribution.

As mentioned, the payment of severance pay and unemployment benefits are closely connected. Legislation on compulsory severance pay was passed in October 1991. Employees are entitled to severance pay when given notice of termination of employment or because the institution or company ceases to exist. Employees do not obtain severance pay if they lose their job through their own fault, if they have reached the age of retirement, if they are entitled to early retirement. (The present retiring age is 55 years for women and 60 for men).

A preliminary pension for the unemployed is also financed by the Solidarity Fund. In size it is equal to the regular entitlements. An unemployed person can obtain a preliminary pension if he has been on the dole for six months, has worked the number of years required for an old age pension, would be entitled to an old age pension within no more than three years, and there is no chance of his being retrained or of finding appropriate employment.

Unemployed school-leavers are entitled to 75 per cent of the current minimum wages, that is, to 6,000 forints a month. This allowance is paid for no more than six months, in the hope that the young person will sooner or later find employment with the help of a retraining or further training course. After this period, the young unemployed are not entitled to social benefits paid to the other unemployed in a similar situation. Social benefits of 4,000 forints a month were introduced in April 1992, but nobody is entitled to them automatically. Local government authorities decide to pay it too, after those no longer entitled to unemployment benefits are submitted to a means test. Travelling expenses of jobseekers can also be paid by the Solidarity Fund.

Job creation activities are at an initial stage in Hungary. In 1991, a total sum of 12,600 million forints was allocated to this purpose by the budget—however, this money was not used in the absence of good programmes. This year 13,500 million forints have been allocated, but expert opinion considers that about 20,000 million forints is what is needed.

The Solidarity Fund finances the training of the unemployed and of those whose employment will cease within a year, the employer having notified the local employment centre that they are to be laid off. Training of public utility workers (e.g. street cleaners) can also be financed from this fund. Their training can be furthered with the help of an allowance or income supplement. Since the allowance for training the unemployed can go as high as 110 per cent of unemployment benefits, it serves as an incentive. Fifty per cent of the costs of training courses and of counselling the unemployed who want to start an enterprise are paid from the employment fund.

According to available data, 87.8 per cent of those on retraining courses are unemployed, the number of those engaged in retraining because they sense the danger of unemployment is relativelly small.

Job extension allowances can also be financed by the employment fund. Employers are entitled to these if they offer a permanent job to an unemployed person and have not laid off anybody doing similar work for the previous six months. Furthermore, the employer must assume the obligation not to lay off anybody carrying out such duties in the three months following the payment of the allowance. In these cases, the fund can cover 50 per cent of wages plus other contributions connected with the job.

Zsolt Csalog

"We Offer Our Love"

Gypsies in Hungary

"Europe is cold. The man from Europe has a soul that has gone cold. He doesn't know how to live in a community—he doesn't know how to love. Gypsies are a small island in the cold. When a stranger strays amongst us and keeps his eyes open, our warmth infects him—I know of more than one case where people abandoned their background to remain with us. That is why mixed marriages, rather than speeding up assimilation, add to the number of Gypsies. I'm a Gypsy and I found myself in Hungarian society, still I wouldn't say that I turned into a Gypsy-born Hungarian. Among the Hungarians I never found the sort of sheltering warmth as among my people. My wife, this fair-haired, white-complexioned woman, lives as a Gypsy among Gypsies and she is happy. If she's asked if she's Hungarian or Gypsy, she answers, 'I was born Hungarian, but I am a Gypsy.' I have a lot of Hungarian friends and I like them, but I see how they live and what I say is I want none of that. Like how Hungarian women take their husband for a money-making machine! Even in that, my wife has become a Gypsy woman. She never ever nagged me to slave away for money! She would rather keep me back: 'We don't need it, stop working, have a rest instead!' In the eyes of a Hungarian, I am 'irresponsible,' I didn't put together a fortune for my kids, for example. I prefer to take it easy, as they say, usually in a tone of envy—whenever I feel like eating caviar, then I eat caviar. If my child feels like seafood, I buy seafood! Let him taste it—our stomachs aren't second class, are they? I don't mind spending money on this kind of stuff—I prefer to drive my twelve-year-old, half-broken down Wartburg. That's how we are. More easy-going and freer than the Hungarians. But warmer, too, we respect our old and we adore our kids—Gypsy communities really stick together. We learnt civilization from the Europeans—but this cold and rigid Europe could learn something from us too, freedom and love."

Doctor Szirtesi was born into a respected family of Gypsy traders. He started as a hospital doctor, becoming a recognized specialist, but he preferred a general practice. Twenty years ago he became the local doctor in a tiny village near a big town (Szeged). At first, the Gypsy colony of the village was not part of his area. Dr Szirtesi, shocked by the sight of quasi-medieval misery,

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Gypsies

They came from India. A journey, which started in the Middle Ages, has not yet come to its end. They did not conquer new homelands, they seeped in and begged for entry. The fact that they were unarmed may well be one of the causes why their hosts, the civilised nations of Europe, cruelly persecuted them, even exterminating them, usually in the West, less so in more backward medieval Hungary. They have no country of their own, their settlements are widely dispersed. Their legal status and social position is problematic everywhere, but particularly in an Eastern Europe that is living through dramatic times.

Gypsy is not a simple ethnic term but a collective name. In spite of an apparent common origin in the distant past, their long journey has created differentiations of language, culture, tradition, and ambition. What unites the multi-coloured mosaic is chiefly a shared fate: the stigmata that necessarily mark all those who are Gypsies.

In earlier centuries there were special Gypsy crafts that provided their livelihood. Some were musicians, others made adobe, carved wooden utensils, some were blacksmiths, tinkers, and horse-copers. Hence relative adjustment was possible. Rural Hungary had need of their goods and services. Modern industry destroyed their markets. Between the two Wars they were already nothing more than the miserable unemployed. Communism not only saved them from the horror of the Nazi death camps—it also offered them employment. The extensive industrialization of the 1950s and after opened the factory gates to Gypsies as well. They were given bread, but barely more. The basic solutions provided for them made no kind of embourgeoisement possible. Their homes were segregated in ghettos and they were segregated on the labour market as well. What they got was the hardest manual work, work that severely damaged health, that involved long and tedious hours of unpleasant travel, jobs that were underpaid. Unable to accumulate possessions or reserves of any sort, once again they find themselves at the head of the queue of victims in the present economic crisis.

There are around 450,000 Gypsies in this country. Much larger figures than that are aired in the press but they lack foundation. The last comprehensive survey of Gypsies in Hungary took place in 1971, with data that allow conclusions to be drawn on the present situation. They are not likely to come to more than 4.5 per cent of the country's population. Nationalist prophets of doom try to magnify the Gypsy "threat," and Gypsy activists also like to boost numbers, imagining that this helps them to obtain aid. It is difficult to understand that the danger does not stem from the fact that there may be too many Gypsies, but from the presence in the body politic of a marginalized underclass.

The public is mostly concerned about Gypsy crime—largely without justification. Popular opinions on Gypsies rest on little real knwledge and much prejudice. Gypsies could be highly suitable scapegoats for a Hungarian society in crisis. Few can grasp that their situation is one of misery and fear, is not a consequence of their genes but of the straightjacket which the majority has forced on them, that their innocence is even greater than their sins, that it is not the Gypsies who must change but the conditions which determine their lives.

requested that the 550 Gypsies of the colony be his patients too. "When a Gypsy came into my surgery, I asked him to sit down. He'd go off into a corner and crouch down on the floor. It would not occur to him to sit on the nice clean chair in the presence of the doctor. They didn't dare to call the doctor to their sick: when somebody was at death's door, they would put him on a pram that was falling apart—four wheels and the frame—and drag him to the surgery through a sea of mud. Sometimes I almost cried." At that time, it was still usual in inns to mark the glasses Gypsies used with red paint, so that Hungarian guests would not drink from a glass used by a Gipsy. Dr Szirtesi's duties went well beyond those of a doctor. "I never mingled with people that my family would disapprove of. Nor did I sit down to a feast with them. But helping them is a different thing. And if somebody did something to them, I became a wasp! Then I felt that it was me that was being humiliated."

A Gypsy doctor, but not just a doctor for Gypsies, for he is loved and respected by Hungarians too. Around ten years ago, there was rumour that Szirtesi was to be transferred to another district. Two thousand people signed a petition protesting that he should stay where he is, because they—Hungarian peasants—loved their doctor. "It felt good. I don't know if this village has ever supported any Hungarian doctor in such a way."

"Were I to be hurt, they would defend me. It only once happened that I was insulted in public. He didn't know me, because he had moved in only recently, but he saw that I was a Gypsy. After surgery I went to the inn to have coffee—and this bumpkin stretched out a leg to trip me up. I stumbled. So he sneered, 'Look at the Gypsy, he almost licked the floor!' I didn't say a word, though I was boiling with rage. I drank my coffee, I stood up to leave again. 'Trying again, are you, Gypsy?' I stepped up to him, and—this kind of thing never happened to me before, I am really ashamed of it, but you are not always in control of your nerves—I hit him really hard. He fell, sweeping three tables along. Then I went out. Later I heard that after I was gone all the others present beat him up, one by one. Ever since, he always takes off his hat when he sees me."

Dr Szirtesi: "In recent decades it was fashionable to boast about how poor your family had been—if your father was a farm hand, you were top dog. I had to be ashamed of myself, I didn't manage to come up with even a hut. I can trace back my family 250 years, but every single member was a respected trader. My grandfather, for example, he had a house of his own in eight or nine towns, and when he travelled on business he didn't stay at a hotel, he slept in his own house everywhere. In Budapest, he had an apartment reserved for him. A carriage stood in front of our villa, the horses were harnessed, and later on my grandfather had a car, with his own chauffeur. His business partners were mainly Jews, owners of textile mills, or, for example, the Counts Meran—and if my grandfather didn't manage to find the time to go to the count, then the count would come to our house.

"Between the two wars we lived in Nagyvárad in Rumania, my father was a fully trained and qualified maître d'hotel and a master vintner, he was the headwaiter of the Magnates' Casino in Nagyvárad, for some time he even

managed the Casino, since the owner lived in Vienna. He wore a bowler-hat and carried a walking stick, my mother wore a veiled hat—that's how we lived.

"My mother's grandmother, who was born in the 1850s, smoked a pipe, as all Gypsy women did in the old days, but when she went to bed she rang the bell, and the maidservant brought in her bedtime reading. As far as I can trace the story of my family, everybody knew how to read and write, even the women. My cousins—I have too many to count off hand—are all university graduates, except one, who is a worker, but a first-class skilled worker. One of my mother's brothers married an Austrian girl, the daughter of an officer—and the captain felt honoured by the marriage! I learnt German from this aunt.

"To cut a long story short, I never felt there was anything special about my studying to be a doctor. In our Gypsy family it was natural! My father did not say a word against it—his only condition was that I should do well.

"So I was not the one who assimilated to Hungarian society, but my grandparents' grandparents. I was born and brought up in this reality. It wasn't hard for me. I know that it was much harder for others."

Indeed it was. Dr Szirtesi knows of only four Gypsy doctors in Hungary. Apparently, there were more between the two wars, when a young Gypsy had more of a chance to attend a university than today. According to the date of the last reliable survey—made in 1971—the proportion of Gypsy university graduates was 0.1 per cent (of illiterates 40 per cent!) a figure unique in Europe. These figures also account for the fact that the political and economic representation of the Gypsies' interests is inadequate, even after the change of régime—there are very few Gypsies in the professions or in white-collar occupations.

"Being excluded" sums up the picture. Starting with the given historical handicap, a young Gypsy has to run an impossible obstacle race for social recognition. Failure is almost guaranteed from the start, as early as in elementary school, or if not there, in secondary school. Typically, a wrist-watch or even just a packed lunch disappears in a student hostel—and right away the only Gypsy there is suspected. With self-esteem crushed, the youngster spends his nights crying, and the end of the story is that the pride of his family and his community, the brilliant student gives up fighting against windmills within six months. The wall of prejudice is built of solid stone.

Or else, he doesn't give up and breasts the tape with a feeling of triumph, only to realize that even the diploma, acquired through toil and suffering, offers no solution. When he starts to work he is made to understand that a Gypsy—with or without a diploma—is always a Gypsy in the eyes of the majority. He has to be grateful that his own people do not cast him out, becuse he has lost his smell and because he has studied: they take his education as a sign of haughtiness. "Hey, let out all the air that is stuck inside you, or it will go smelly." If somebody somehow manages to climb over that wall of prejudice, he will try to disappear without a trace—if it is shameful to be a Gypsy, who wants to bear this mark? Many hope that if they study, they will be able to wash off the signs of their origin, "now nobody will know that I am a Gypsy!" But

this is an illusion. Slovaks, Germans, Serbs in Hungary may succeed in camouflaging themselves—but Gypsy physical features are easily recognized. The Gypsy community will lose these assimilated, runaway Gypsies, their knowledge will not be used to benefit their own people. The personal profit of the evasion is a rootless, split life in a blind alley. The final result is the absence of Gypsy intellectuals and professionals.

It is the life of an artist that offers something to this talented people. Actors, dancers, splendid poets, colourful, imaginative painters, artists, whose Gypsy origins are stamped on their work, are the gift Gypsies have presented to Hungarian culture. Gypsy musicians are part of a group that has lived in Hungary since the Middle Ages. These Hungarian Gypsies no longer speak the Romany language of Indian origin. The better musicians are a special caste within this group, probably the most respected of all Gypsies. Quite a few of them have studied at the Academy of Music, but the leader of a band is no worse if his skills are merely rooted in family tradition. Several have earned world fame (Aladár Rácz, the *cimbalom* player, was loved and admired by Igor Stravinsky), their orchestras tour Western Europe and America. However, their audiences in the West probably do not know that the music they play is neither Hungarian nor Gypsy folk music but the popular café music of the 19th and early 20th century.

Genuine Gypsy folk music is an entirely different thing; although it hasn't been commercialized, its popularity has been on the rise. This music is that of people who still speak Romany, the language of Gypsies; it is authentic, living folk music, at a time when the folk music of Hungarian peasants is not a living culture any more. Musically, it has ancient roots and its lyrics move the listener with their timeliness: these are prison-ballads, the sorrows of an itinerant worker's life, the hardships of exile. The instruments are a guitar and whatever is available—a water-can, two spoons—and the human voice. There is a home for refugees in a run-down staff building of the abandoned airport in Szeged. Gypsies occupy it and a recently formed group rehearses there, surrounded by an unlimited wide audience. Splendid dancers, happy faces, ecstatic vigour. It is as important as the "Black is Beautiful" movement of the American blacks was. It gives a sense of dignity and an awakening to the values of the despised Gypsy culture and to the beauty of their body—an extremely timely experience. Dr Szirtesi's "blonde Gypsy" wife organizes the group. Dr Szirtesi comments: "Those who are dancing proudly here were wearing rags and were begging in the street in their childhood. It took an enormous effort to give them human dignity. We didn't have the means to help them financially—but we have changed them into proud human beings who know how to laugh!" Almost all of them are unemployed.

Gilvánfa is a hamlet in Transdanubia. The inhabitants are almost all Gypsies. (Rumanian-speaking Gypsies. These people, who used to make their living carving wooden kitchen utensils and were known by a tribal name derived from their occupation, became Rumanian speakers in the course of their wanderings and are now bilingual in Rumanian and Hungarian.) Almost all are

unemployed. Here, the nursery school is a tiny island of civilization. Kati, the teacher, has undertaken a mission, she directs this frontier stronghold with competence and affection. The only Gypsy women who are not unemployed work here: the cook, the cleaner and Marika, a beautiful nurse, who teaches Hungarian and Rumanian poems to the children and tells them tales in Rumanian, bringing them up not to be ashamed of their native language. Marika's grandfather was an itinerant wood carver. He tells us how they spent half their lives on the go because the gendarmes were always moving them on.

Miklós, a small boy wearing glasses, lives with his parents on the outskirts of the village, in a small Gypsy house. He is famous: he has been to France twice already! "I was in the fourth year at school, we'd been learning French for a year when the teacher asked me if I wanted to go to France. There was an invitation and the five best at French could go. Well, I was not scared! So we hit the road that summer, the five of us—all five Gypsies. We were lodged with families, each one to a single family, so we didn't even see each other for three weeks. I saw the teacher twice. He stayed in Chateaubriant and I stayed in Nantes, in the Loire department. It was pretty tough in the beginning, but then I got used to it. I'd left my dictionary at home, so in the beginning I had to guess each word—but the French were very nice to me. They knew that we are Gypsies but they didn't care. These things don't matter in France. The sea was my greatest experience. And Paris, especially at night—that was the most beautiful. I loved it there. This was two years ago, but then they invited me again last year, so I returned. And French boys and girls also came to visit with their parents, and they loved it here, they didn't mind that we have such a small house. I have quite a few French books, I read them from time to time, and now I even teach French to the others. I'd like to be a teacher—but that's a long way ahead." A teacher who can work miracles could really do something, not only transmit knowledge, but give the children self-respect. Wings that will let them soar. Perhaps, these children at long last will make it—if deprivation does not devour them halfway.

Alsószentmárton: a village in the Southern marches of Transdanubia, with 916 inhabitants, of which 915 are Rumanian-speaking Gypsies. The other is the Catholic priest. Originally, it was a peasant village with an adjoining Gypsy colony; the first house in the village proper was bought in 1920 by a Gypsy family from the colony. The last peasant family left in 1977—ever since, Alsószentmárton has been a purely Gypsy village, the first one in Hungary. Up to the 70s, there were plenty of jobs in the area. The Gypsies had to make do with the hardest and poorest paid jobs; and not even locally, but in the surroundig area. The Gypsies soon switched from basket-weaving to regular factory work: in 1977, 83 per cent of the active population were in employment. There was trouble enough all the same. The majority had only seasonal jobs, women hardly had any. Gypsies were seldom employed in agriculture, communal development regressed tragically as a result of a lack of money, the slum did not disappear but grew—however, the Gypsy community stayed alive and paid its debts incurred in purchasing the village.

Until the end of the 80s. Then—almost overnight—the economic collapse deprived them of their means of subsistence. Gypsy jobs disappeared, or became fewer and fewer. The crucial moment came when the cement works in Beremend were bought by a German company that promptly started to modernize it—and laid off Gypsy labour. Which brought in the present situation of an unemployment rate at 80 per cent, a bare trickle of money coming into the village, small welfare allowances barely enough to pay off debts. A dramatic crisis. The priest is dressed like every one else, children call him by his first name and talk to him in Rumanian. He knows that his congregation needs more than the word of God. He organizes the whole day, collects charitable contributions (from the Church, from the government, from the parishioners of Rüdinghausen in Germany), he distributes food and organizes basket-weaving classes—and he is almost satisfied. Nobody has to starve and there is no crime wave. Not yet, at least. The local government authority (for the first time in history a body consisting of Gypsies) and no one else budgets out of nothing and plans heroically. They have obtained buildings that house a basket-weaving workshop and saw mill; the available labour is suitable, Germany provides affective demand—but when will an entrepreneur knock at the door with the necessary capital? (Not much really, 5 million forints—$62,500.) The sinking ship cannot be kept afloat for long, the labour force will be demoralized, the young will go to the dogs. The effort of a whole generation has proved to be in vain.

To add to this, this penniless village has 48 refugees from Yugoslavia to feed, all of them Gypsies, not relatives, but "they have to live somewhere, the poor things!" And the people are afraid. War-stricken Croatia is only a few kilometres away, at night they can hear the thunder of guns—what if the apocalypse crosses the border? Uncle Marci is a rare specimen, a peasant Gypsy; a few years ago he was famous for his beautiful horses and bullocks fattened for the Italian market—today he has only one horse left, he has sold his cattle, he will not buy more and does not dare to start with pigs; the market has collapsed, taxes have risen to an impossible degree, fodder has become expensive—a reasonable person will not invest his own time and money with the certainty of loss in view. "And what if we have to flee? How do we run away with the animals? Should I let them loose, in the name of God? Now I keep only as many pigs as we eat. How we will get money for anything else, I just don't know."

Monor: a village in the great Plain, a mere 30 kilometres from Budapest—with a run-down Gypsy colony. Here, the tide has already risen over the heads of the inhabitants. A tiny, ramshackle house barely stands, roof about to collapse—inside, it gleams with cleanliness, exuberant decoration, the Lilliputian room decorated with 42 dolls. "Only the two of us live here now, me and my younger son. My husband died five years ago—but he drank all our money anyway, I never saw any money from him, may he rest in peace. I am not used to this misery, my father was a good Gypsy musician, my mother was half Hungarian! Now the trouble is that this son of mine is unemployed, and when

he manages to get day labour sometimes, that will bring in no more than 500 forint (=$6.2). I don't even know what to buy with it: shoes? a coat? or food? My elder son, imagine, was killed by a crane working on a building. And I didn't get a penny after him, 'cause they said it was his fault. Imagine that! My elder son left me three children, but I couldn't take care of them, having to go to hospital for an operation, so they were taken in care. I am a sick woman, with my heart and my lungs, and my stomach is nervous, I live only on medicine, sixteen different pills, but still I'm so dizzy that sometimes I almost hit the wall. When I became blind in my right eye, they gave me a small allowance, but tell me what can I do with 5600 forints (=$70) a month. The roof is leaking, I am always scared that it will fall on our heads, but I can't have it fixed and the local authority will not help! When I was in prison, I had to work in there, but they deducted the orphan's allowance for my son's children from my wages. They promised me that they would pay it back because of my illness, but they have done nothing about that! And my medicine costs heaps of money and I must buy it. Otherwise it's the cemetery. And what happened lately? I pop over to my daughter to ask for some medicine for my headache; I ran out of it—I came back and what do I see—the window is smashed! They broke in through the window, they climbed in and took my gas cylinder together with the adaptor! They took even my small radio! I went to the police—and believe me they didn't even come out! When somebody steals from a Gypsy, it does not interest them! And now I don't have anything to put on the fire, I can't fetch wood from the forest: there's a guard by the forest, with a gun, and I have to pay a 500 forint fine even if I take a little twig—where on earth should I get that 500 from? My God, what will become of us?!"

The motley surface conceals a living hell. Sometimes, hell is not even concealed: it is open to our eyes in all its nakedness. The aggressive measures of the 60s and 70s have eliminated most of the old Gypsy colonies that provided home and the warmth of a nest to the traditional communities—only to create new ghettos, new slums in abandoned military barracks, in desolate districts of towns, and cities where misery takes its toll and the force of the community is not present.

Ever since the Middle Ages, the Gypsies have always tried to assimilate in every possible way—which is natural for a minority. There were times, relatively good, when this seemed to bring some success,when the traditional occupations of the Gypsies: locksmith, tinker, horse-coper, adobe maker, musician, etc. fitted well into the social division of labour, then certain Gypsies (e.g. musicians) had the chance of *embourgeoisement,* many mixed marriages lessened isolation. However, from the turn of this century, the development of modern factories struck a blow to the economic security of the Gypsies and mass pauperization was the result. In conjunction with it, prejudice increased and reached its peak during the Second World War in the Holocaust. According to estimates, some 60,000 Gypsies from Hungary died in the concentration camps of Hungary and Germany, a crime which cannot only be laid on the head of German Nazism. Hungarians were eager to collaborate. Let us simply note that

the families of the Gypsy victims of the Holocaust have never received any compensation, even the legality of the claims has not been assessed.

Uncle Marci, the "peasant-Gypsy", remembers: "In 43, I was working for a Jewish tenant farmer. When my master was taken for forced labour service, I could not keep my mouth shut and said: 'You are taking this man, of all people? He's the kindest man here!' 'What are you talking about? You can go with him!'—and they took me. Eighteen from this village, young Gypsies. We went to Linz to dig bunkers, for two bloody years. We got payment by results, we didn't get bread unless we completed the norm—we toiled to death, though in the end we were bombed day and night. I met Hungarian Jews there, they slept under a bridge, with guards of course. And I took them food, theirs was even worse than ours! I smuggled our black bread—made with sawdust—for a week, then the officer noticed me. I ran away, but he followed me. 'Who is the swine who feeds the Jews here? Step out!' I didn't step out, of course. Then they bought over the guard of the Jews, a German sergeant, and he walked down the line three times to identify the culprit. Oh, my God, I will soon have holes in my skin! He stopped in front of me, but I was so weak that I couldn't even look back. He went on. Didn't he recognize me? Or maybe he did, he just didn't want to say? Up to this day, I don't know. 'It wasn't one of these', he said. I stopped taking bread to the Jews, because we were really frightened.—Those Jews that I knew, none of them returned home. We were lucky, all eighteen of us made it home somehow. But they still owe us our two years' wages."

By the 40s, the majority of Gypsies in Hungary earned a living by doing occasional agricultural work; however, the Gypsies were somehow left out of the general land reform, and thus, they could not engage in agriculture. From the 50s, the typical Gypsy way of life was that of the "itinerant worker": men left their homes in the remote areas of the country, mainly in the backward, over-populated Eastern counties, to work in Budapest and the new, "socialist" industrial centres. They saw their families once a week or fortnight. This was a step forward: full employment, guaranteed minimal wages—but no chance of a middle-class lifestyle. As long as unskilled labour was marketable, there was no incentive to study; the vast majority of Gypsy workers stayed unskilled. Thus, it is a logical continuation that when this present economic crisis set in, the first to find themselves without a job were the Gypsies. By the end of 1992, unemployment in Hungary will have reached 10 per cent. Among Gypsies, unemployment is around 60 per cent on a national average, but in the Eastern part of Hungary there are many villages where the unemployment rate is 100 per cent. And there is no hope. On the one hand, it is the lamentable state of the Hungarian economy that bolts the cage, and on the other, discrimination, jealousy, and growing prejudice.

In this new situation, the dreams of assimilation have vanished. The Gypsies are looking for new ways. The various tribes speaking a variety of languages and of differing cultures, that have so far considered each other as strangers, now realize that they are companions in a shared distress—and they are

together learning the moves of never-before-tried political action. In 1990, at the time of the first free elections, the liberal Free Democrats supported Gypsy rights and they managed to get two Gypsies elected to parliament—the first time in Hungarian history. Nevertheless, the political representation of the Gypsies—especially on a local level—has not been dealt with, and the situation is open in several directions. Many have already started to feel nostalgia for the recent past when the situation of the Gypsies was not as tragic as nowadays: the communist era is slowly being enveloped in the mists of embellishing distance. As a leader in the Gypsy movement says: "Big freedom is in, but the Gypsies are even worse off than before. Before, if I was sacked from the factory and I managed to prove that I was sacked because I'm a Gypsy, I could go to the party, the party secretary picked up the phone and rang the factory, the manager was frightened—and took me back. But now, where can a poor Gypsy go? I wouldn't be surprised if the Gypsies wanted the old system back. We preferred that one to this, that's for sure. And what will happen at the next elections? The Gypsies stand for at least one hundred thousand votes—that is something! We can easily tip the scales! For us, all parties are the same if they help us. For example, if we gave our votes to the socialists, we could cause a bit of a surprise!"

Ernő, 30 years old, lives in Budapest. His life reads like a novel. He was born in a prison hospital, brought up in state care, together with many Gypsy inmates—since, according to the everyday practice of "socialism", if the family could not guarantee the conditions of an education for the children, they were taken in care. This placed them in even greater jeopardy. Many claim such establishments were simply training schools for criminals. However, this was not true in Ernő's case; when the guardianship of the state was over and he found himself in the street, he rejected the obvious choice of crime and started to work hard. However, the sensitive boy could not put up with the inhuman barrack-world of the workers' hostels and the rough, hostile atmosphere. So, he became homeless, living in the streets. He worked during the day—and at night, he slept rough, hiding from the police. He met a blonde teenage girl who had fled to the street from a heartless home—their relationship turned into one of romantic love. They were planning to get married and start a normal life, they wanted to make peace with her parents—but the parents didn't want to hear about a Gypsy lover. The girl, driven to despair by poverty and lack of prospects, committed suicide. Ernő ended up in the psychiatric ward of a hospital. When he had made a partial recovery, his life took a new course: a few weeks of work, a few weeks of roving in the street, a few weeks of hospital, and so on. A few years ago he found a deserted cellar in the outskirts of Budapest—he broke in and has been living there ever since. Friends—a journalist and a lawyer—fought for his rights and managed to legalize him as a tenant in his miserable home. It seemed that his fate would turn to the better, he even had a partner in life, a deaf-mute Gypsy woman, a pickpocket, whom Ernő got to abandon her trade—the sort of thing we usually read about in hagiographies—and they lived quietly on a disability pension and on odd jobs.

Until lately, when skinheads found Ernő and chose him as a victim. Once, as he walked home alone at night coming from a Gypsy festival—in a quite busy part of the city, four skinheads assaulted him, kicked and beat him badly, an ambulance had to take him to hospital. Opposite his basement dwelling is a school for apprentices which has become the headquarters of the skinheads of the neighbourhood. They block his way in the street and threaten him. He must not walk about in this neighbourhood, otherwise "he will be in trouble". They throw stink bombs into his room through the window, foul smell, everything is full of shattered glass—the policemen sniff around, mumble and go. Ernő leaves the house only with a dog and a canister of mace in his pocket. "This is not a solution, I know: they also have mace and they know much better how to use it. I live in constant fear, I have nightmares. I am far from being a bully, my behaviour is not provocative—but it is written on my face that I'm a Gypsy, a 'stranger'. Even on the tram I am ashamed, I try to hide myself, looking around all the time to see if I am not too visible, if I inspire aversion in people, I try to be as small as a mouse—is it possible to live like that? Who can I trust, who can I look to for protection? Perhaps the police? It's clear that they are not on my side, but on that of the skinheads! The skinheads don't hide any more, they go rampaging about freely. What kind of human beings are they, my God, what kind of human beings? They try to prove that they are good Hungarians by killing Gypsies? Black boots, white shoelaces, more or less as if they are going hunting! They can do it, nothing and nobody will stop them! Lately Hungary is being called an 'island of peace'—and in fact, there is no civil war. It is relatively peaceful. But why should I compare the country that I am a citizen of to any other country? Nobody has the right to come up with Yugoslavia, Russia, and Rumania all the time, I have to survive here and not somewhere else!"

"Once, in communist times", says Dr Szirtesi, "when the Gypsy issue was debated, they invited me to Parliament as a Gypsy leader. I even had the opportunity to speak to the Hungarians. I raised my hands and said: 'We are offering our hands, our love! Accept it! If you reject us, we will feel as whores driven out into the street. And we don't want to go to bed for peanuts, we want to love! If you return our love with love, our life—and your life—will be more beautiful. But if it's always us who try to approach the Hungarians and the Hungarians reject us, we will resign ourselves to our lot and not try again. How many times can you hurt and throw away a woman's love? Twice, maybe three times, but then love dies in her heart!'—I spoke to them with a pure soul—but these things are never taken seriously."

Károly Bari

Elegy for the Night

Elégia az éjszakáról

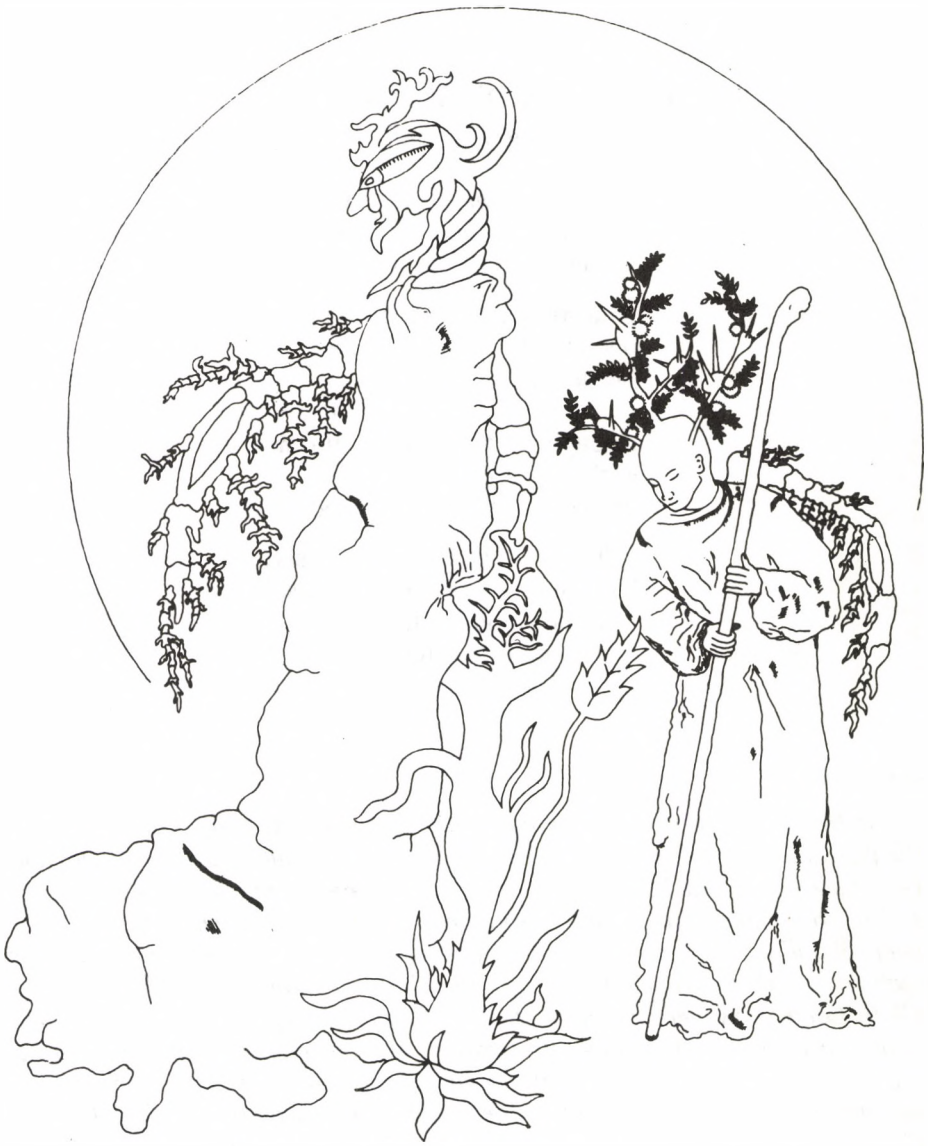
Perhaps it is the autumn river,
the shrieking leaves in its whirlpool's swirl
that has the crows upset, swooping,
swarming excitedly about the red-threaded
amulet glowing around the sunset's wrist,
cawing crazily, recalling ill omens:
the tulip-crown-slicing rays,
the masked pebbles prowling in the park,
the revolt of leaves,
the suspicious fires,
the sniffing flames at the fog's bas relief.
The heights rustle like a wanted poster.
Did my abandoned friends: the golden reed,
embroidered on the storm's silky skull,
the amphibian silence, the foam-veil peeling sea,
turn me in out of revenge?
Would they have named me so that I could be caught?
So that eternity could arrest my deserter's breath?
The roads, quivering eyelids draped over hope's balcony,
are running from the wild thunder to the clouds.
And of the wandering, no chronicles are left.
The aroused rain, decorated with the illuminated
initials of the martyred blackberry branches,
slashes the golden prairies. In their long army coats
the swaying weeping willows play their accordions
like ghosts of the hinterland.
And in the dark warehouses of bones: P.O.W. hearts,
wearing pulsating-blue straw gloves,
sort and separate their rotted delusions.
The aroused moonbeams cross desert distances.
Atop their undulating pedestals,
the statue-still seagulls clash with the night;
the night that, with rumbling drumbeats,

Károly Bari *is a Gypsy poet and painter, author of several volumes of poems and collections of Gypsy folk tales.*

occupies the believed invincible time,
with strobe lights fills the air raid shelters of the drunk.
Sitting on barstools, perspiring,
cockscombed boys are lost in front of neon-muscled mirrors;
their mouths surrender smoke-soaked
fresh cut flowers, fists, studded belts.
From beneath he kleptomaniac's memory cape,
treasures hidden since childhood, appear:
opaque-polished dawns
and rings, like ferris wheels, braided into the sunset's hair.
My setting face does not sink with the gathering of snarling shadows
that drawn by the scent of blood,
does not disappear when the glowing eyes encircle the concrete pits.
I, invincible night, go at a thundering gallop.
The burnt out ligthbulb,
the needle-sharp flame tattooing the dark,
the hissing,
the bookshelves' crowded teeth
sway in the unstoppable flood.
Your roar, as women's helmeted fingertips
parade on my naked thighs,
straightens the lashes of frightened eyes.
And the guard lusts for the loin's black fields
like an aroused cobra, who, in its fury,
raises its head; becomes erect
and invincible forces lay siege to rock-hard embraces
because he sees his lust as the growing ecstasy
worming its way into the hole.
O night
it is you they are celebrating;
the lovers breathing bouquets of sparks,
and from their passion opened cages
passions fly;
even the eloquent leaves
kneel to you, to praise you.
But the avenging horizon sees your marching columns
and attacks,
the maimed darkness,
the slamming of doors,
the creaking of floors everywhere.
And the world in the dream's witness-box
has its silence broken
by a red hot instrument of torture: the sun,
confesses its conspiracy with the vanquished
stone, water and air.

And the condemning winter dawns before me.
The light is the guard at the gate of this maximum security landscape.
With difficulty, he calls out the names written in Braille.
And from his touch, the indecipherable hoarfrost
begins to glow.

Translated by Endre Farkas



Gyula Illyés

Two Posthumous Poems on 1956

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri

In the Summer of 1957

1957 nyarán

They move weighed down with fruit:
apricot boughs in the wind
gesture against the sky.

And sometimes hurl to the ground,
one by one, hard as bombs,
the season's fruit.
These fly
through the air which is ill-omened,
each one of them to rot
unripe, just like the damned.

...The rest, the more anxiously,
hide among leaves that morosely
hiss and sough on the tree,
they cling more stubbornly
to the delirious boughs—

These two poems were found in manuscript among Gyula Illyés's papers after the poet's death in 1983. The first one could not be published for its obvious reference to the crushed Revolution of 1956. The second, written in the late 1930s, to commemorate the Republican dead of the Spanish Civil War, had been abandoned at the time and appeared in its unfinished form among a number of other fragments by Illyés in a literary magazine in the Spring of 1949. Later, however, Illyés deleted the four lines referring to Spain—indicated here by a dotted line—and rewrote the ultimate line of the poem, to include an allegorical reference to the Hungarian national colours, thus making it clear that he meant the poem to commemorate the dead of the 1956 Revolution. Both poems first appeared in the literary monthly Holmi, *1992/1.— The Editor.*

as an infant to its mother,
who is hungry, who is crazed:

as a grown man to his homeland,
storm-beaten, laid waste.

Funeral March

Gyászinduló

Hail to you who have fought,
who have fought ready to die.
Glory to you who have died:
your death sets an example.

You who have risen, you who have bravely fallen,
you who were proud and upright before the judge,
you living cemeteries who stand like corn,
and bleeding to death in hiding, you who escaped,

oh how high you have climbed above our age,
this dark age that's afraid to live and die!
How pure the peak from which you now survey us.
Uncover your breast-wounds.

Widows, orphans, now, if you shed tears, know:
the centuries will weep instead of you.
Fathers, mothers, look at us and see:
now the future has become your child.

And we, the mourners — let us all step forward:
mourning's a grim christening for us.
Let us raise our faces, raise our tearful faces.
Where pain is, there is great power.

Let us take as our example the small seed,
which down beneath the earth acquired its task
and begins to live only when it is dead...
Whoever died for his people, he is risen.

For nothing disappears from the earth's face,
be it snow or light or power of any kind —

Honour and glory now be to the banner
which so falls on the earth, if fall it must,
as to cover half a country with its colours —
the colours of blood, white sunlight and green leaves...

1956–PARALLEL STORIES

Version 1: Ágnes Nemes Nagy

For years my friend Ali (Alaine Polcz) has wanted the four of us (Miklós Mészöly, Alaine, Balázs and me) to write down or put on tape what we lived through in 1956, so now I'll try and scribble something. She's right. Gradually we've grown so old or ill that the story has become blurred within us; this is our last chance to get it quickly down on paper. For it is not without interest: four stories may come to light, which agree on certain points and are completely different at other places, depending on how each person saw it, and how she or he retained it. And, after all, this too is a tiny frame of history.

In October 1956—I don't remember the date exactly, but it was during the waves of fighting, before November 4th, and before an agreement had been reached with the government (of Imre Nagy), when they kept announcing on the radio the time by which the revolutionaries should lay down their arms—Ali and Miklós came round to us one evening. This was something that happened quite frequently, we were always visiting each other; we lived near each other too (they at number 48 Városmajor utca and we at number 2/A Kékgolyó utca). So Ali and Miklós came round. We talked, listened to the radio and were anxious. All at once Ali said, "I've got a feeling something's going to happen to us this evening." Ali's premonitions were famous; but this was the first time I experienced one of them. We immediately fell on her. What's going to happen? Good or bad? Ali was guarded. Well..., she said, good and bad. In the meantime we could hear shots. Where from? We didn't know. We had the impression that at our very building, at the corner of

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At the instigation of Alain Polcz, a clinical psychologist married to the novelist Miklós Mészöly, the poet Ágnes Nemes Nagy and herself in 1991 committed to paper their memories of the days of the 1956 Revolution. These weeks the two couples (Ágnes Nemes Nagy was then married to the critic Balázs Lengyel) spent largely together. The original idea was that all four produce their versions of the same events, but the two husbands have so far failed to do so. Ágnes Nemes Nagy completed her notes a fortnight before her death in August 1991.

Most names figuring in the memoirs are those of wellknown poets and writers.—The Editor

Kékgolyó utca, young people were building some sort of barricade—quite apart from the shooting—out of decrepit beds, boards and industrial waste. At that stage barricades were being built everywhere, but why here in Buda, in Kékgolyó utca? It was rather surrealistic. Miklós asked whether we had any bread. I gave him a half kilo loaf. Miklós went out onto the balcony in the dark—because by then we'd turned off the lights—and threw it down to the barricade builders. Some people think this was connected to what came next. I don't think it was. It happened much earlier. And how would the Russian tank have known? Later we heard shots again, this time much nearer. Next day I heard that a Hungarian tank was going up Krisztina körút in the direction of Moszkva tér, while a Russian tank was coming in the opposite direction, and they exchanged fire. By this time we had moved in the dark into the room looking onto Jakobinusok tere so that we could watch the events. Three of us, Ali, Balázs and I, sat on the settee, Miklós crouched by the window and looked out from there. All at once there was a huge explosion: our building had been hit by a shell fired by the Russian tank (since that was the one opposite us—though further away), and every window in the house was shattered. A piece of shrapnel (or a whole shell? Though that's unlikely) seared through the wall. It came in from under the floor, crossed the room diagonally and pierced the wall opposite high up. We jumped up and looked to see whether we were still alive, whether we were wounded, but at the most we had scratches from the broken glass. I remember I didn't jump up quite quickly enough, Balázs raised me in alarm: what's the matter, what's the matter; not even Miklós was wounded though he was nearest to the shooting. We rushed down to the air raid shelter which no one had used since 1945, but not just us, the whole building rushed down; we all had the same idea without anyone having discussed it. Luckily there were only broken glass wounds, as it turned out later, the building had been enfiladed by a machine gun too. There we sat in alarm. Later on two railwaymen from the South Station came into the shelter seeking refuge. One of them was wounded in the arm.

Then gradually the shooting died down, and we drifted back to the flat; all the residents did the same. I can't remember now whether Miklós and Ali stayed the night with us or not. The windows—as I said—were shattered everywhere; it was cold, there was a cannon-shell in the wall, everything was full of glass splinters, October weather. The next day (?) we went round to Ali and Miklós. At their invitation we spent the remainder of 1956 at their place. They invited our lodger as well, together with his girlfriend. That's how it was in those days.

Deviation: lodgers. In the Rákosi regime one could only dispose over a certain amount of square metres. When my mother died, my sister Éva got married, which meant we weren't justified in having a flat of that size (three rooms and a lobby). So we took in a lodger. We needed the money too, we were as poor as church mice. It was a nice flat, or it would have been had we been capable of maintaining it, repairing the war damage, furnishing it. It was shaped like the prow of a ship: its longer side looked onto Kékgolyó utca, the

shorter onto Jakobinusok tere, Vérmező Park, and Buda Castle; you could see the Buda hills from every window. Directly under us in Kékgolyó utca there was an 18th century courtyard, in the rectangular 'U' of which only artisans lived: the blacksmith (I've written about him several times), who I used to visit in the old days to watch horses being shod (the sign read, "Ferenc Polgár blacksmith and cartwright"), an upholsterer and a coalman. The coalman's 14 year old son allegedly died in the shooting at the Kékgolyó utca barricade. Who knows whether that's truth or legend. The little unit of five single-storey houses, with the courtyard in the middle was closed off from the street by a thick stone wall; a remnant of the old Városmajor. Allegedly the first workshop of the Ganz Factory was here at one time; when demolition work started, we tried to get it preserved as an "industrial monument". It was a crazy undertaking in those days; of course we had no luck. The Kékgolyó Inn, with its vaulted cellar and the old inn-sign which was at the corner, was the first to go. So, the lodgers. Sport and poetry. A tall, blond gym teacher lived with us; he was a pleasant boy, very fit; he slipped a disc, was operated on and got better. Then there was József Bakucz, the poet, and his girlfriend, the gorgeous, red-haired Erna. They used to come into our room from time to time and we talked. (Erna came to visit; nothing else concerned us, except that József Bakucz should be registered as our lodger.) D.S. lived in the small room; it was him and his girlfriend that Ali invited. This girlfriend (nursery school teacher?) created some awkward situations: she stole all sorts of things. From me, maybe from Ali too. Where could Bakucz have been at the time of the shooting? Maybe at his parents' home. We were on good terms. Later on, we know, he left the country, and became an American Hungarian poet.

We four survived. Miklós and Ali took us in. The house belonged to Loránt Basch, he lived on the ground floor (a beautiful museum flat), and by a stroke of unbelievable luck Miklós and Ali had the second floor. A flat like that in those days! So they took us in. László Németh was living at the Baschs' at that time; there was perpetual toing and froing. Why was he living there? I don't remember the reason now. It wasn't exactly dull to spend 1956 in the company of Miklós, Basch and László Németh. Constant discussions of literature and society. Sometimes the cheerful, blonde Ella turned up (Mrs Németh). Excursions to the Writers' Union in Bajza utca—on foot, of course. There was no public transport.

"I mustn't move around, get excited or even talk," said László Németh. "My heart, my blood pressure. Don't even try to talk to me." We didn't. But it was always he who violated the self-inflicted restrictions. I'm not surprised. Not to comment on things—then? at that time? a short Németh study on Europe, on history, on the situation, the Russians. He sat and talked. "How can you imagine that? The Russians won't let us, their booty, out of their grasp. And Europe isn't going to lift its little finger to help. This is wonderful, but it's a national tragedy. All it does is create an excuse for extreme reprisals." We were younger and thought differently. For us it was ardour and euphoria. Disputes this way and that. Németh: rationalism and the Russians. "Rational-

ism is dangerous, it's like syphilis. The developed European nations are used to it, they know how to deal with it, they fit it into their society. But if rationalism hits a nation like the Russians—especially an extreme type like Marxism—it becomes destructive, it makes ears and noses drop off." Ibolya, the concierge, tells of a clash between a Russian patrol and the freedom fighters. Németh: "How nice. People immediately start calling them freedom fighters of their own accord." We are sitting on the terrace in the vaguely optimistic autumn sunshine. It's only Németh who's pessimistic, as usual. All of a sudden Ella appears. "No, Laci, you can't do that. Everyone's at the Writers' Union, Illyés, Péter Veres, not to mention Áron Tamási. I'll get hold of a car for you. You must take part." "No!" (Németh). "You must!" (Ella). Heated argument. Ella takes Németh away. He writes or makes a statement for *Irodalmi Ujság* (a literary weekly).

Another detail. Domestic and literary. Ali and I were dicing bottled green beans. We were sitting on two little chairs in the so-called green room, with the bowl between us, cleaning and cutting the beans. Meanwhile, to keep ourselves amused, we recited Rilke in Hungarian (occasionally in German). László Németh stops in the doorway: "What are you two talking about?" We tell him. "Rilke?", L.N. exclaims, "Rilke? He's quite incomprehensible." Ali and I look at each other in astonishment over the beans. We couldn't say a word. Incomprehensible? Rilke?

Yet another instance. Certain details are coming to life like a mosaic. For example this. We're on the way to the Writers' Union. (When? I don't know. During the revolution.) Zsoli Jékely, Miklós and Balázs are walking in front—Ali and I are a few paces behind them. All at once there is machine-gun fire close by. We were at the "tunnel" of the 61 tram, just before Moszkva tér, where there is an overpass and on either side a grassy bank planted with shrubs. A machine-gun. We, Ali and I, saw the following. Miklós and Balázs go down on one knee in exactly the same movement and flatten out against the bank. Zsoli stands motionless in the middle of the street (tram-lines). Ali and I, not knowing what to do, squatted down in a girlish way. The machine-gun bursts are finished. What was that? What's happened? You are daring, Zsoli! He remained standing in the middle. Zsoli says. "Daring, me? When I heard the shots, and I saw Miklós and Balázs—who were soldiers in the war—taking cover so expertly, I was so scared I couldn't move. I've had enough. I'm going home." He said goodbye and went home to Óbuda. (It wasn't then that he knocked down the fighter in the Lukács swimming pool.)

The four of us go on. At Moszkva tér we see that at the top of the hill, in Várfok utca, a huge crowd has gathered. We climb up. A young girl is addressing the crowd from a lorry. "Imre Nagy is with us." People clap. The crowd holds up the cars, searches them and lets them go. An ambulance comes. It doesn't stop, the crowd yells, machine-gun fire straight into the crowd from the sham-ambulance. Secret police disguised as an ambulance. Many of us are killed, (fall down?) screams. Most of the crowd—us included—throw themselves over the iron railings in Várfok utca and roll down to the Moszkva tér

pavement, into the gutter beside the pavement. We all roll down on top of each other. Ali and I somersault again and again over each other and others. (In the meantime I, like an idiot, climbed back for a moment to get my handbag which I'd left there.) Balázs shouts, "Come on!" Down in the gutter; Miklós in front, now on all fours, we three behind him; Ali jerks Miklós back sharply by the belt. He wants to rush ahead on all fours like a crazy wild dog or some kind of tiger, on after the sham-ambulance which has swung down into Széna tér. Shrieks, explosion. We learnt afterwards someone had rolled a can of petrol in front of the ambulance, and it exploded. (I wrote about this in a disguised way in my poem *Akhenaton's Night*, this falling, this rolling. The tanks. There is nearly always reality behind my surreal images. My imagination is bound to the soil.)

Did we then go on to the Writers' Union? Where something was always happening? I don't know. I remember that on one occasion live hens were being distributed among the writers, a friendly gift from a cooperative farm. The corridor was full of chicken coops. What exactly we did after the sham-ambulance battle is erased from my memory. The last clear picture I have is of Miklós's fiercely determined face, Balázs's arm as he pulls me back, and as I help Ali pull Miklós back. In front of us, the flames of the burning car leap high over Moszkva tér.

There are so many things I ought to be recounting! Balázs's arrest (January 19th, 1957). The house search. Going round to Miklós and Ali's place at dawn. Very cautiously, so as not to compromise them. The glazier. Our neighbour (an old woman at the Sylvesters to whom I say that I'm at the Gyorskocsi utca Police Station, and if I don't come back someone should know where I've gone). Sylvester, in blood up to the knees, had lived through Bloody Thursday in Parliament Square. Secret rendezvous with Kati at ten in the evening under the Chain Bridge, telephone number. Basch, Keresztury, Gebey when he offers to defend Balázs in court (an old classmate of B's; in the meantime they'd lost contact, but then he turned up). Miklós Gyárfás's correct information. Sanyi's brother also to defend Balázs. Stupid Panni Somogyi's phone call which—more than likely—was the reason why Lakat was arrested. At that time our phone was permanently tapped. Bibó. He questions Balázs in detail as to how they go about arresting someone. He was getting prepared. How people in the street took Balázs's part. Strangers kept ringing the bell and assuring us of their sympathy. A boy from Transylvania writes a poem for Balázs. Our writer friends come to take their leave. Zsoli brings Illyés along too. Zsoli and the skiing trousers. Long johns. Prison parcels. Pilinszky doesn't dare come round, only much later. He was in bed, saying he was ill, apparently he asked István Király to come and visit him. (That's highly improbable, obviously gossip.) Seriously ill: Cipi Ottlik. He had pancreatitis right through the little siege. (It was called that too.) Very nearly fatal. He spoke once at the Writers' Union, at the beginning. At the Basilica, after coming back from visiting Cipi in bed: Laci Kálnoky as he rushes forward and shouts at the

convoy of soldiers sitting on trucks "Don't shoot!" The fresh-faced Hungarian soldiers sat silently, their rifles between their legs. The whole street yells "Don't shoot!" As everyone knows, they changed sides. The Kecskemét tank division with huge red, white and green flags at the Octogon. The miners from Dorog at the Krisztina Church. The collection chests outside the Déryné Café and everywhere. I'll try and write all this down. We hear that Magda Szabó and her husband aren't at home, but the door is opened by Bóka. Put down the loaf of bread, a short chat, Bóka says, "Even my dishonesty has its limits." (Later it turned out that it hasn't.) (How interesting Bóka is as a character.) (Everybody is interesting.)

July 30, 1991

Version 2. Alaine Polcz

We got back from Transylvania on October 23, 1956, and there wasn't even salt at home. Nothing in the way of food. Nor money either. Miklós left home at 11 in the morning to pick up some money at his publishers in New York House.

"Wait, I'll be home soon, I'll bring some money and do the shopping on the way."

I didn't see him till dawn the next day. As he went up the stairs in the publishing house, he ran into—I think—Pál Réz, who said: "Come on, there's a demonstration! You can pick up the money afterwards."

I waited at home. Getting hungrier and hungrier. Then at about four or five in the afternoon, people started ringing up to say that there was a demonstration in such and such a place. I set out too. First of all I went to Bem tér where the first big gathering was, and after that—I remember it was growing dark—I went to Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út, not far from the Parliament. I was standing in the crowd. At one stage I was with Laci Kálnoky for a while. The crowd was desperate. Not desperate, restless: we were anxious because tanks were moving ahead of us on Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út. Is there going to be fighting too? But at the same time, we were hoping there'd be no bloodshed. And we shouted out to the soldiers, "Don't shoot!" The soldiers waved back from the tanks that they weren't going to shoot. We were hopeful. It was evening and I went home. Of course, there wasn't a sign of Miklós. I tried telephoning here and there. Balázs Lengyel knew nothing about him. No one did. After 11 I felt it was too late to disturb people. The town grew quiet. Quieter than usual. I sat in silence and looked out into the night. I knew that Miklós was out there somewhere in the unknown. When I heard shots in the distance, I knew that where the shooting was, that's where he would be. I knew too that the soldiers had opened fire after all. That's how it started.

Towards dawn the phone rang. It was Miklós.

"We're going to take the Radio in a moment. Just wait a bit more. I'll be home soon." Then an almighty explosion.

"Did you hear that? It was a handgrenade."

"A Hungarian writer should stay alive and write, not fight."

"That's what you think. My place is right here."

I was worried about him. I knew he had no sense of danger. I felt I simply had to prevent him somehow from dying somewhere on the barricades. So I insisted.

"If you don't come home this minute, I'm going over there. I want to be there too."

"Now, at four in the morning? Alone on the bridge?" he asked in alarm. "No buses or trams are running."

"It's not me who's at stake. You know me well enough to know that I'm not afraid to cross the bridge, I'm not afraid to cross town at night. If you don't start for home, I'll be there." So he shouted:

"That's blackmail!"

"Yes, it is. But you know me. I'm off! Give me your word that you'll come home!"

He was very angry. But by the time the sun was up, he was home. Happy and excited, he told me what had happened.

We set out in the early morning with Balázs Lengyel and Ágnes. At Moszkva tér I had a premonition. In Várfok utca—it descends steeply—a car stopped with secret policemen dressed in white in it. At the beginning they chatted in a friendly way, after all they were disguised as doctors and ambulance men. During the talks or showing of papers it became clear that they were secret police. At which they opened up on us bystanders at a range of two metres with submachine-guns. We threw ourselves over the railings: I remember that Ágnes and I scrambled across together, and as we rolled down the grassy slope, we collided with each other several times. Once she was on top, then me, and we got down to the pavement at the edge of which was a little ditch, a gutter.

Ágnes wrote about this later in one of her poems: "He jumped a parapet / with others, / together they rolled sheer, / a lump, a spasm, they fell, constant volleys overhead, one on the other / like a landslide." (*Akhenaton's Night,* translated by Hugh Maxton.)

When we got to the bottom, Miklós, who was two to three metres ahead of me, got down on all fours with shining eyes and was about to rush towards the car. People had rolled a barrel in front of the secret police car, which had turned on its side and was beginning to burn. The people inside were dragged out and taken to a doorway. Were they lynched or handed over to someone? I don't know who the official authority was then. I can't remember now. What I do remember is that Zsoli Jékely stood motionless behind us during the shooting, his arms akimbo. It wasn't out of bravery that he stood there, he was so shocked he couldn't move.

We started walking and stopped at the far corner of Moszkva tér, where we

met up with some people we knew. We wanted to go to Parliament Square to demonstrate. I'm not quite sure whether it was the same day as the strange things happened at Balázs and Ágnes's flat later in the evening or not, but I certainly know that I didn't want to go. I begged Miklós not to. "I don't feel well. Let's go home." He replied that I was a coward. I managed to talk him out of it with great difficulty. That was the morning of the slaughter in Parliament Square.

Late afternoon that day—which day was it?—we were at Balázs and Ágnes's place. I don't know the date. We wanted to stay the night: at that time it was quite natural. We were together a lot and we were very close. It's rare to have such a warm friendship between two couples. Balázs and I were the gentle ones, the obedient ones, and Ágnes and Miklós were tigers, the noble beasts, whom we sometimes looked on with horror and tried to tame and mollify with varying degrees of success. Of course, there was a lot of love in them too.

So we went round to their flat, which was on the third or fourth floor of the building on the corner of Kékgolyó utca overlooking the Vérmező park, and was solid windows on both sides. Huge panes of glass. And a balcony. First we sat in the room looking onto Kékgolyó utca. Here again I was seized with dread. I saw Balázs's head, the naked skull, with no skin. I told them I had a premonition, but I didn't tell them I had a fear of death—not for myself, but for us all. I skirted the issue. I said to one of the three, maybe to Miklós, that I had a death fear. But it referred only to me. I didn't want to say it was for all of us, and especially not that it was stronger for them.

When I asked Miklós not to leave the house that day, he was again very annoyed, but he promised not to.

Later on we saw that down below they were building a barricade, blocking off the road leading to the Krisztina junction. At the corner where there was more space, they had positioned a railway carriage or a tram across the road. We watched in amazement—they were young boys—as they unwired the light from one of the big streetlamps. Lower down, on the post, they opened a little door, put their hand in, and there was no lighting. We called down to them and exchanged a few words. Miklós asked them if they were hungry. He threw down half a loaf of bread to them. Ágnes gave it to him. When we went back into the flat from the balcony, I was overtaken by a total feeling of hopelessness: it was no use being afraid, no use not leaving the house, there was no way to help things. What has to happen will happen.

After a few peaceful minutes—or maybe half an hour, I don't know now, times get mixed up, but I can see the picture clearly in my mind—a Soviet tank arrived. (At that time we never imagined the tanks would fire at houses.) We were curious to see what it would do, and we watched at one of the big windows: Miklós crouched at the right hand corner of the window and looked out, Ágnes and Balázs sat on the edge of the divan, and I knelt on the divan further back, looking from the back to the three of them, feeling anxious. I heard a huge bang and, to my astonishment, the street opened up before us, accompanied by the smell of sulphur given off by the exploding rounds, and

the whirling October evening fog hit my face. I seem to remember that Miklós shouted: "Down!" I don't know whether Ágnes and Balázs flopped on their bellies or not. I stayed where I was, dumbfounded. After the firing, I quickly looked around and saw Ágnes and Balázs crawling backwards to safety. In the very next moment they started to machine-gun the building. And Miklós spoke up briskly, freshly: he too escaped to the back. Then all at once I was filled with happiness and relief that this was it, and we'd survived.

The building took another nine rounds and it was splattered all over by a burst of machine-gun fire. We crawled to the back of the flat for safety. I wasn't afraid any more, though it seemed as if there was no shelter anywhere in this house with its walls of glass (in fact there was only a row of big window panes). The room which had been hit was separated from the hall by a glass door. There was nowhere else to shelter but the lavatory. We crawled there and threw ourselves on top of each other in the narrow space. Someone shouted that we should go down to the cellar, to the air raid shelter. I remember us running down the stairs. The stairs seemed to go on for ever and all the while they were shooting up the house. (I was happy and relieved.) I don't remember the cellar. I haven't the faintest idea what we did there or what happened. I don't even remember getting down there. But we were certainly there.

I'm not quite sure where we spent the night: the curfew had already started by then. We probably cowered somewhere in the flat. That must have happened, because I remember the next morning: we were amazed to see that the curtain rail, together with the curtain, had been thrown back to the upper part of the room, and was stuck there on the wall. Huge bits of glass and splinters were embedded in the floor with their sharp ends uppermost, we had to get them out with pincers, the big panes of glass were thick.

Not a single pane of glass remained intact in that six-storey building: outside in the street the shattered glass lay in heaps, as if the pavement were covered in snow crystals. Every window in the building was broken, we had to sweep and sweep. The heating wasn't working, the radiators were damaged. It was obvious that the flat was uninhabitable. So Ágnes and Balázs came round to our place. We invited their lodger too, and his girlfriend—a young, slightly chubby girl, and a cat. Who did the cat belong to? We regarded it as quite natural that they should all come to us, they couldn't have stayed in the flat.

I often look at the building today. All those little white squares on the walls are the traces of bullets and shrapnel or, rather, the repair work. As far as I know—that was how it was explained to me—the shells had exploded on the windowsill, and the shrapnel came into the room and penetrated the back wall: they were what caused the greatest damage. The windows had broken under the shock-wave too, of course.

The marvellous thing was that we all survived unharmed. I can't understand that to this day. Another shell had made a hole in the parquet floor from underneath and threw shrapnel up to the ceiling. Where Miklós squatted, where he had leant his forehead against the window, a handsized piece re-

mained intact. I asked an engineer about it, and he said it was impossible that his forehead had supported the glass. I consider it a miracle even today. The fact that we all got away with it. What did I mean by a miracle? I can't explain that and I don't want to, either.

The only other time I was as scared as that during or after the revolution was when people started to get arrested. Then, within six weeks, my hair turned grey at the temples. For a long time afterwards, when the arrests were less frequent, when a car stopped outside our house at night my heart used to beat so wildly that the world turned dark. But I learnt that one has to wait: my heart would gradually quieten down and then the strange breathlessness, which I felt at those times (because of the rapid heartbeats), would pass and I could breathe freely and begin to see again. I had this feeling for years afterwards. The cars at night and arrests—just like the air raids before. Aunt Ilonka, the concierge's wife, said on several occasions: "Do go away, Mr Mészöly, people came here asking questions. A police car was parked outside the house for two hours yesterday."

Once when the bell rang in the night, everyone fled. The concierge and his wife climbed out onto the roof. Some people climbed up the fire escape and crouched there, some hid in the garden among the bushes. Miklós didn't want to hide. (Actually, it was very difficult.) Then someone advised him to spend each night at a different place: at that time writers often slept here and there.

So Ágnes and Balázs came round to our place and that was the start of life in Városmajor utca. A few days later their lodger moved out. I remember being a bit puzzled by the girl, she was an odd creature. I don't remember how we divided up the flat for sleeping. Only after Balázs's arrest: it was cold by then. We heated just a small part of the flat: we put a divan in the wider part of the lobby, and Ágnes slept there. At times I slipped in beside her in the evening, or I went to comfort her in the morning. (Those days provided the material for Miklós's short story *Tragédia*.)

Ágnes had an awful lot to bear at that time. I can still see her withdrawn, disciplined face.

To return to those revolutionary days: what was life like in Városmajor utca? I seem to remember that Laci Németh came to live there too. I found the way that Ágnes scrubbed the kitchen floor strange. I wanted to take the floor cloth from her, but she wouldn't let me have it. And I was amazed at how differently we washed our hair.

We often went to the Writers' Union. It was a lovely walk. We hardly noticed the distance from Városmajor to Bajza utca. There was no public transport, of course. Sometimes Miklós, Balázs and Ágnes would argue about some theoretical question. At one time Miklós was yelling and Ágnes was shouting, and I begged Miklós to stop. "You can't talk like that to her, dear, they're our guests after all. If you shout like that they'll have to leave the place and they've nowhere to go, they've got no home." After the shouting match they made it up quietly.

The disputes with Laci Németh were milder, but frequent, and in general he assessed things differently. I remember clearly that during the revolution, when the workers' councils were elected, Laci said bitterly (one of his son-in-laws was a workers' council member) that with that list in their hands, they would know who to arrest later on. Laci Németh was there after the revolution had been crushed too. He was very frightened of people. Not the firing. I was afraid of the firing. Never of people, unless they were going to take the men away. I don't think I had any reason to be worried about myself, apart from anything else, I was toughened up to a point.

Laci was scared. We wanted to open up the wall and wall him into an unused part of the staircase, which had been joined recently to our flat. Then it transpired that one of the members of the family who lived below us, or their friend, was a secret police colonel, and they too—by opening up the wall—wanted to hide him there. We laughed a lot afterwards about what would have happened if László Németh and the secret police colonel had met in the walled part. We even decided that we would leave a little crack so that we could always hand in food.

Laci said once (he always had poison on him) that we should protest against the crushing of the revolution and against the government by a Hungarian writer committing suicide every two days. He would be the first.

Later on, in connection with this, Ágnes once said: "This government thinks you can't keep the country going without writers. I only hope they don't realize they're wrong." I talked about this to Ágnes recently: she laughed and said: "I may have been the first person to say so, but the whole country knew that."

One day we were at the Writers' Union and they were distributing food. We were given a couple of chickens. I think Bandi Vajda must have been with us: he came all the way home. Wonderful times. Those long, long walks to Bajza utca and back, and of course, we spent a few hours there too. Bandi Vajda carried the chickens in his arms so they didn't have to hang head down and they wouldn't come to any harm. It was quite something then, a couple of hens. Aunt Ilonka, the concierge's wife, put them in a coop. And one morning—because we were putting off eating them—we found them both dead. Some animal or other had sucked their blood.

I remember that at dawn on November 4th, Miklós and I were standing at the window of the little room, and I saw the green bullets. Miklós said they were tracers. The start of the Soviet attack. It was early on Sunday morning.

On November the 1st, All Saints' Day, the four of us went to the cemetery. At the entrance to the Farkasrét cemetery there was a round flower-bed (it's still there, but it's been smartened up and prettified). There were masses of flowers there. It was waist deep in flowers. Several hundred candles were burning. The crowd mourned the fallen in silence. We walked up and down and I wanted to light, or I lit, candles on the neglected graves, just like we used to do when I was a child.

What happened, I can't describe it all. Some wonderful things. For instance,

at the corner of the street where Ágnes lived there was a dry cleaner's and next to it a watchmaker and jeweller's. Both shops were hit, and the jewellery and watches were lying out on the pavement and no one touched them. We saw that, because we were in that flat a lot (the shops got hit at the same time as we did). Later they put the watches back in the shop window, and everything was there in the broken shop window: no one took anything. There were miracles like that during the revolution.

Bread, potatoes and cheese were handed out free from the backs of trucks in the street. We queued up with Ágnes and Balázs at the baker's in Városmajor utca. They were living with us by then. We queued quietly in twos in the yard, without a word. The bakers worked voluntarily during the shooting so that there would be bread. We were on the alert. We were queuing in the yard because it would have been more dangerous in the street if a tank should come by and start shooting. (I don't remember whether there were any air attacks.) They handed out the bread through the back door. Everyone was allowed one loaf: we got the money ready beforehand in small change, and the bakers never looked to see how much anyone paid. We hadn't had bread for days by then, and, nice or not, two or three or all four of us got in the queue and took a loaf each.

After the Soviet attack, some kind of dreadful passivity came over me, I just sat around. There was nothing to make me move, and for two or three days I couldn't eat anything. Mami (my former mother-in-law) was passive during the fighting in the war, and she could hardly eat even when we had plenty of food, or only very little. And she was like that: she withdrew into a dark corner and didn't really want to move. Could this be the way old people react to fighting? But we were still young then, around thirty-five. We had long hair down to our shoulders. Zsoli Jékely said to Ágnes and me and to Magda Szabó (she was on good terms with Ágnes, and that's when I got to know her) with a smile that our hair should flow, let it flow!

After the final suppression of the revolution, all three of us cut our hair without discussing it among ourselves. I remember how symbolic that coincidence was.

Once we were at the South Railway Station: before the big new building was built, there was a grassy slope there, covered in snow. The winter sun was shining, the snow was dazzling, and Ágnes sad: "*Oh, Lebensmitte, feierliche Zeit*", which she translated for me as "Oh, the noon of life, what a festive time." Was this during the revolution or after it, when our lives had got better and we believed in something? But there was snow. Or before it?

Young people don't know, people don't know that the zenith of life is a festive time. The fact that Ágnes said it then made me aware of it. I've known it ever since. When we were sixteen and our teachers told us that these were the best years of our lives, we were annoyed and wanted to know why this time was so good. Now I know... Now, when I'm in my seventies.

So what was it like? Then, at the beginning? Well, we believed in it. We had hopes. When we heard on the radio that the Soviet tanks were leaving the

country, and the Soviet tanks were coming into the country, then that they were surrounding Budapest, we still didn't believe that they were going to attack. We thought it was impossible. We couldn't imagine it. We protested, we walked to the Writers' Union and we talked, and there were battles here and there against units in Budapest, but that later on there might be a general attack... we didn't believe that. Only occasional news reached us from the country. The peasantry, the countryside was slow to stir. But once they started to stir, the gifts of food kept coming.

Only later did we hear about the dreadful things that happened, for instance at Mosonmagyaróvár, where a defenceless crowd was fired on, and other things, and the mass of arrests. We guessed, but we had no idea of the full extent. After all, Balázs had been taken away. Ágnes will describe that exactly later on. I'm jumping about in my memories now, but it doesn't matter.

One time when we were staying the night again with Ágnes and Balázs (they had done the flat up by then), we were saying that when we four stay here together, something always happens. And what would happen now? We'll get arrested, one of us said. Me perhaps? We had a good laugh about that. And then we discussed what we should say if any of us were arrested. It was a vital question as to whether it was a revolution or a counter-revolution. By that time they had insisted on the use of the word counter-revolution. Because, after all, at the beginning Kádár came back from Moscow as the president of the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government. Revolutionary: only later did the revolution become a counter-revolution. What a systematic con that was. And as we saw it and struggled against it, we sank deeper and deeper. So we were staying the night with Ágnes and Balázs and talking about what could come next. Arrest. We discuss it. What if they ask us whether it is a revolution or a counter-revolution? If we say revolution, that's four or five years in prison. If we say counter-revolution, it means one is dishonest to oneself and to one's friends. We agree that one has to say, "the things I saw, those events were a revolution." If they bring this and that up—because there were atrocities too—"I didn't see a single one." I really didn't see any apart from the ambulance. But I treated Gizella Sponták's son, who was there in Kossuth Lajos tér, in the crowd around Parliament. He was three or four years old, his mother escaped with him to the bridge, but even there they kept firing into the crowd. The child forgot it, he didn't know exactly what happened. Because Gizi covered him with her body, but even so, for years after that I could tell from his games the sort of pressures he lived with. And the woman who ran along waving a holed cap and shouting, "This is all that's left of my husband." And the others, and the others? But it's not my job to talk about Parliament Square. Or the mass of executions later on.

And we distributed Áron Tamási's beautiful protest manuscript which had the title *Thought and Creed* (Gond és hitvallás). I still remember the sentence "In the clear water of our revolution even now what foreign hooves are trampling," from his wonderful lines. There were a lot of copies of this

declaration at Ágnes and Balázs's flat. Then we went to sleep. The arrest didn't take place that day, Balázs was taken away the next day. Naturally at night. Ágnes very cleverly got rid of the protest manuscript as they were searching the house and watching her every movement.

Then there was the Russian conscript who walked down Krisztina körút, pale and staggering, with a tortured, sad face—not from feeling unwell physically. This was well after the big attack and when there was no longer any resistance. Miklós and I felt so sorry for him that I wanted to go up to him and comfort him in some way. Did those conscripts know why they were fighting and where they were fighting? They thought they were in a different country. What had they been told? Could they have been Estonians or Latvians? I ask myself this today. In those days we didn't pay attention to that.

After Balázs's arrest, there was a curfew. Ágnes came round in the early morning. She rang the bell. And she said in surprise, so you're at home, Miklós? You see, Miklós always rushed off to where there was shooting. Why they took Balázs away, and why they let him go, I still don't understand to this day. How Miklós got out of it, I don't understand either. The four of us, Ágnes, Balázs, Miklós and I, were practically always together in the street, at the Writers' Union, in our flat, in the cellar. Then Ágnes came to stay with us. We asked her to sleep at our place when Balázs had been taken away. She looked into space and didn't speak, but she stayed. I don't know how many days she spent with us. Perhaps right up till Balázs's release? The fact is that one day the phone rang, and someone wanted to speak to Ágnes. Then a male voice said: "Your husband will be home in two hours, madam." We looked at each other in amazement. How do they know that Ágnes is here?

Balázs's release, István Lakatos's release, then much, much later Zoltán Zelk, Obersovszky, Gáli, Árpád Göncz—but that's another story.

Translated by Elizabeth Szász

István Lakatos

Poet in the Dock

Documents from a Political Trial, 1957-58

Ordered by: Béla Biszku, Minister of the Interior of the Hungarian People's Republic
Approved by: Géza Szénási, Chief Public Prosecutor

DECISION CONCERNING PRE-TRIAL DETENTION AND HOUSE SEARCH

I, Police Detective Captain János Tóth, Chief Investigator of the Department for Investigation of the Political Inspectorate of the National Police Headquarters of the Department of the Interior, have examined materials pertaining to the criminal activity of István LAKATOS (b. 1927 Bicske, mother's maiden name Margit Gaszt, of Hungarian ethnic origin, a Hungarian citizen, not a party member, poet, resident of Budapest), and

I have determined,

that the Ministry of the Interior of the Hungarian People's Republic is in possession of materials showing that István Lakatos committed the crime of incitement at the time of the counterrevolution and thereafter. István Lakatos, in October and early November 1956, as contributor to the counter-revolutionary journal *Igazság,* published the poems "The Young" and "Revolution" in that journal, as well as reports headed "Two Snapshots" and "Images and Reports from the Street." As a member of the presidium of the Writers' Union, he took part in the drafting of the presidium's manifesto, produced on or about the tenth of November and widely distributed.

In the light of the above, I have decided, because of the crime of incitement to hatred against the fundamental institutions of the people's democratic state, as defined in section 2, sub-section b of the Summary of the Judicial Code, committed by István Lakatos, residing at Budapest V, Alkotmány u. 4, to order a search of his person in conformity with paragraph 126 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Pre-trial detention is to begin on March 27, 1957.

Pre-trial detention, in accordance with paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, is to last until the preliminary hearing, and is not to exceed two months.

Detective Captain János Tóth

István Lakatos *is a poet and author of an autobiography published in 1991. His many translations include a complete Virgil.*

Seconded by: *Lieutenant György Virág*
Deputy Head of Subsection

*

I was detained in the Spring of 1957, at the same time as many other Hungarian writers. The accusation was of "active participation in activities inimical to the order of the people's democratic state." I was held on remand for one and a half years. After countless hearings, I was sentenced to a prison term of two years and ten months, which was reduced to one year and ten months on appeal. The trial documents, many thousands of pages, meticulously supplemented by typed texts of my telephone conversations secretly taped after my release, are now accessible. It is from these documents that I quote.

HANDWRITTEN STATEMENT MADE IN THE FŐ UTCA PRISON (END OF MARCH, 1957)
(excerpts)

As a prisoner on remand, I have been required to give an account of my activities from October 23, 1956 until I was arrested on March 12, 1957.

I wish to state at the outset that I take full responsibility for my every action, statement, article, and verse. It is my conviction that everything that I did was right, and that there is nothing of which I have to be ashamed. To the best of my knowledge, I am innocent; what I did was done honourably, and I am proud that there is no need to change my opinions or principles today, just as there was none in the past.

So much for that. Let me add one more thing to clarify what follows: I am not a communist, have never been a Party member, I am not even a Marxist. Given that, one should not expect of me what one does of a Marxist writer, which a non-party member like myself should not be asked to account for. [...]

October 23, 1956. Someone phoned at noon from the Writers' Union—I think it was one of the administrative staff—and asked me, if possible, to be in front of the Union at about two o'clock; from there we would probably walk in procession to the Bem statue.

October 25. In the evening I received a call from the "New York" newspaper building. A man's voice told me that a group of young intellectuals, journalists, writers and students were planning to start a daily, *Igazság* [meaning both *Truth* and *Justice* in Hungarian] and that they would like me to contribute right from the first issue, which was to be published the next day. They asked me for poems, I told them that I couldn't write poetry under such conditions—besides I didn't know who they were. At their repeated request, I agreed to the following: "My 1949 book of poetry, *A pokol tornácán* (On Hell's Porch) can be found in any library", I told them, "in it is my poem *A fiatalokhoz* (To the Young). I think that poem is relevant today as well. Publish that." I

found out the next day that it did indeed appear, on the first page of the first issue of *Igazság*. [...]

Briefly: from *October 27—November 3*, I was doing three different things. One was the most important, the work with the writers' group, whose spokesman I am. Concerning this, the following is relevant.

From 1945 to 1949, an extraordinarily gifted group of young writers were emerging in the then still existing—non-communist—literary journals, including *Válasz* (Answer), edited by Gyula Illyés; *Újhold* (New Moon), edited by Balázs Lengyel, as well as *Magyarok* (Hungarians), *Kortárs* (Contemporary), and the Pécs magazine *Sorsunk* (Our Fate), all under changing editors. The writers were Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Magda Szabó, Sándor Weöres, János Pilinszky, Endre Vajda, István Jánosy, Iván Mándy, László Kálnoky, Miklós Vidor, and others—all aged between twenty and forty, and what they had in common was that they were not Marxists and did not identify socialist realism as the only possible literary style. From the beginning of 1949, their work was officially suppressed, and could not be commented on, to the great detriment of Hungarian literature as a whole. I was one of them, and fought for their recognition and rehabilitation before, and particularly during, the events of October and November 1956.

I made a speech lasting around three quarters of an hour at the meeting of the Writers' Union on September 17, on their behalf and on my own. In it, I summed up both my literary perceptions and my political views. An abridged version was published in the next issue of *Irodalmi Újság* (Literary News). The investigating authorities confiscated the full text of the speech as evidence on the day of my arrest. I am happy to make it available to you, since I still agree with its contents. It will make clear what I was thinking before the events of October, and at the same time justify my later actions.

In September the presidium of the Writers' Union, persuaded by my speech, already decided to propose to the government that it licence publication of our planned literary journal, *Magyar Orfeusz* (Hungarian Orpheus). All was going forward as well as could be expected and, but for the events of October, we would have started publication in November. Our friends suggested Balázs Lengyel as Editor, with Iván Mándy, János Pilinszky, László Kálnoky. and myself as his associates. Other work I did, in addition to the planning of our journal and discussions with friends concerning the foundation of a publishing house, concerned the Writers' Union.

Between October 27 and November 3, it became clear that, in addition to my activities as a journalist, I was turning up pretty regularly at the Union offices. I took no part in its management during this period, since I became a member of the presidium only at an extraordinary meeting on the first or second of November.

The speech I gave at this meeting was confiscated in a house search. This confiscation was superfluous, since it was published nearly *in toto* in the report on the meeting in *Igazság*. This speech made two points, the first was my recommendation to dissolve the party organization within the Writers' Union,

arguing that it would be more proper to let our communist friends be politically active in organizations where they lived. I said that because at the time the most diverse parties were mushrooming everywhere, and I felt it appropriate that the Writers' Union itself should have no party organizations within it, since every party would then demand its own. I feel the same way today.

The second point made in my speech was my appeal to my fellow writers for agreement among ourselves. I emphasized that we should preserve the unity we had achieved, in the service of one end: the establishment of an independent, democratic Hungary. Later, in more peaceful times, we could deal with our personal differences.

The meeting expressed solidarity with the revolution. Try as I may, I cannot remember that anyone of those writers who later, after November 4, vilified the Writers' Union so spiritedly, then spoke out against this. [...]

I was primarily occupied with the work of the Writers' Union's presidium. At our first meeting, on or about November 10, we formulated a declaration under the heading *Hungarian Intellectuals Address the Nation,* of which mention was made in a declaration published by *Népszabadság* and *Népakarat* around the end of November.

After that we had frequent presidium meetings. The full presidium meetings in November and the first part of December had a single item on their agenda: to express our outrage at the deportation of young Hungarians to Russia. Our protest was voiced in every possible way. We drafted a petition that was signed by every prominent Hungarian intellectual; we sent a letter to Nehru, Tito, Bulganin, Khruschev, Voroshilov, and to the Hungarian government. A delegation was sent to Parliament on several occasions and to the Russian Military Command. Foreign journalists were informed. We sent telegrammes to the writers' unions and PEN Clubs of the world, and to various scholarly associations. We sent more of these letters, declarations, and telegrammes than one could count. A high-ranking Russian military officer said about the deportations, I don't know whether to a delegation of our organization or of some other, "There is no need for you to get excited. You speak of deportations. Indeed, we are taking young Hungarians to the Soviet Union, but this is not deportation. We are not taking them to Siberia, just to Ungvár (Uzhhorod) and Munkács (Mukacevo). Let us say we are disengaging them from belligerent actions. Please understand that this is necessary. Imagine what would happen if we just arrested and disarmed, say, a thousand young men. If we let them go, in a few days they would be armed again and fighting against us. This is why we are taking them out of the country until the uprising has run its course. Once order is restored, we will turn them over to the Hungarian authorities."

Those are the facts.

At least this is plain speaking. Even if I do not agree with it, at least I understand his point of view. In contrast to this, the government here constantly prated on about how not a single young Hungarian was being taken beyond the country's borders. Even today, they are unwilling to admit that this happened.

I do not doubt that these young people were handed over to the Hungarian

authorities, since I have no way of checking. But would it not be more proper for them to show as much honesty as that Soviet officer, instead of telling lies?

After the Kádár government's suspension of the Writers' Union, I retired from all public office. From this point on, no writings of mine were published; I no longer maintained contact with the members of the presidium, devoting my whole time to literary work and studies at home, until the day of my arrest. [...]

MINUTES OF INTERROGATION NOS. 7 AND 8 OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATION, POLITICAL INSPECTOCRATE OF THE NATIONAL POLICE HEADQUARTERS OF THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR, RECORDED APRIL 25 AND 26, 1957. *(Excerpts)*

Just before the events of October, I, together with fellow younger writers of my generation, who by and large have been together since 1947, worked to create a periodical, *Magyar Orfeusz,* which corresponded to our notions of a literary journal. In this connection, I spoke at the meeting of the Writers' Union of September 17, 1956, requesting a journal for our group, as well as representation on the presidium. Arrangements for the journal were progressing nicely, and before publication, Balázs Lengyel and I each wrote an article, he for *Irodalmi Újság,* and I for *Művelt Nép* [...] My article in *Művelt Nép* listed the goals of our group [...] I mentioned "intellectualism" as our common characteristic, all members of our group giving priority to ideas over feelings and instincts. This applied to poetry as well, in which we tried to illuminate and explain even feelings through logical means. We were essentially apolitical, keeping our distance from the current political questions and the verse that referred to it. On the other hand, we were concerned with general questions of Hungarian culture and general human problems. Our intention was to embrace every literary current and style, emphasizing that every kind of literature has a right to exist. [...] We rejected the notion that socialist realism was the only appropriate style. We wished to achieve an organic relationship with the literature of our time in both socialist and non-socialist countries, and definitely rejected Zhdanov's assertion that the literature of western capitalist countries had reached a state of rot.

(In answer to a further question): In addition to myself, our group included Balázs Lengyel, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Iván Mándy, György Rába, János Pilinszky, István Jánosy, Miklós Vidor, Magda Szabó, Győző Határ, László Kálnoky, Zoltán Jékely, and Sándor Weöres. Everyone of the writers I mention had his own, slightly different views, and his own style and literary line [...]

(To a question): Since we received a favourable response concerning the journal from the Writers' Union, my writer friends and I set to its planning. [...] As I recall, we met two or three times (...) At a larger meeting, nearly the whole group was there, including Balázs Lengyel, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Iván Mándy, György Rába, János Pilinszky. We agreed that Lengyel would be the editor, and that the editorial committee would include László Kálnoky, János

Pilinszky, Sándor Weöres, Iván Mándy, and myself. After the events of October, we again asked that *Magyar Orfeusz* be licenced. I also raised this issue at the meetings, as a member of the presidium. The presidium unanimously agreed to ask the government for permission to publish *Magyar Orfeusz* as well as the Union's journals that were already in existence.

*

In the course of 1957, I was interrogated on six more occasions—this made fourteen times in all—the last time on November 25th. So I had occasion, though not too often, to leaf through my Virgil in the coolness of my cell. I completed the better part on my translation of the Aeneid with the help of a stolen pencil-lead as I recounted in my autobiography. The testimony of sixteen of my colleagues and acquaintances is appended to my trial transcript.

There is no space to go further into the minutes of my trial, nor is there any need to, since they contain fundamentally the same material that I outlined myself (though hastily) before my interrogation—and this is more authentic than an interpretation of my words à la János Tóth.

I would like to examine one point of the indictment here, a point which receives more attention than its due in both the investigative reports and the trial minutes. This concerns my poem A fiatalokhoz *(To the Young) about which perhaps more questions were asked than about anything else. This pretty mediocre poem is a vivid example of what a tremendous fuss can be made out of something totally trivial in the context of a political frame-up.*

I wrote the poem in September 1948; it was published in a journal around that time and in my first book of verse in 1949. The same year, without my knowledge or involvement, György Gera selected it for an anthology he was editing, Erős Bástya *(Powerful Stronghold), published in Budapest for the World Democratic Youth Federation's second congress.*

The message is not the class struggle. It says—if one may put a lyric verse of many meanings into prose—that it is the young that overthrow tyranny everywhere; it is they who will someday build a better world; they, not the armies, are the most powerful force on earth.

When, the day after the events of October 1956, the journal Igazság *asked me on the telephone for a lead article, I suggested this poem rather than a prose piece as the most suitable work from me for the occasion, and read it into the telephone. My Asclepiadean ode, apparently the uprising's first poetic salutation, thus appeared on the title page of the first product of the revolution's free press, on the morning of the 25th, and it was then printed on two further occasions.*

But I did change two words in the poem. In the sixth stanza of the older version, it sait that "we will be those who defend it." I replaced "defend" with "overthrow," and, in the light of the recent events in Poland, replaced "Moscow" with "Warsaw." It really makes no difference. The section in question should be understood like this: "If we are satisfied with the new world, we will defend it; otherwise we will overthrow it." This is referred to in the last sentence: "Let him who is afraid be afraid of us." "We shall overthrow" is somehow more effective; already in 1949, I had written that, in ink, in the margin of my copy.

The prosecuting authorities made an issue of this change of words. There was no use my resorting to various explanations to defend myself against the charge of incitement to overthrow the legal order of the democratic state. Of all the witnesses cited in my defense, the com-

munist poet Péter Kuczka's (whom I had hitherto not numbered among my friends, but who conducted himself in this affair most honourably) dialectical interpretation mirrors my intention most clearly. As far as the lawyer was concerned, he was of course right: if the regimes of Rákosi or Gerő were democratic, then I was indeed inciting their overthrow. In this sense, my poem is counter-revolutionary beyond doubt, but not just in 1956; it was so from the start.

T. B. I. 8060/1958/2
Budapest City Court

The Court of the City of Budapest, in connection with the prosecution of *István Lakatos* for his participation in activities intended to overthrow the legal order of the people's democratic state, resolved as follows at a preliminary hearing on June 26th 1958:

The city Court accepts the indictment of the City District Attorney's office # 040/1958 and, on the basis of that indictment, directs the fixing of a date for a hearing.

Since the indictment of the City District Attorney is supported by the documents, the Court accepts the indictment.

The District Attorney charges the accused with the crime outlined in section 1, paragraph 2 of the *BHÖ*, which is punishable by law by a prison sentence of five to fifteen years. In view of this, the City Court orders that the accused (with regard to Bp. paragraph 97, part b) be held in preliminary detention, as allowed by Bp. paragraph 100, part 2, until a definitive decision is made at the main hearing, since in view of the expected length of the sentence an intention to escape must be presumed.

Budapest, June 16, 1958

István Szűcs, People's Assessor
Béla Guidi, Presiding Judge
Antal Szépvölgyi, People's Assessor

T.B. I. 8060/1958
Budapest City Court

MINUTES PREPARED AT THE CLOSED HEARING HELD AT 9 A.M., SEPTEMBER 2ND 1958, OF THE CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS INITIATED AGAINST ISTVÁN LAKATOS FOR THE CRIME OF PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITY DIRECTED AGAINST THE LEGAL ORDER OF THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC STATE. PRESENT WERE:

Béla Guidi, Presiding Judge; Miklós Rosner, József Vértes, People's Assessors; Dr János Balogh, clerk; Dr Róbert Rónai prosecuting counsel; István Lakatos, defendant; Dr József Nehéz-Posony, defence counsel.

The Presiding Judge opens the hearing, establishing that the above are present.

It is decreed that the City Court will sit in camera for this case.

This is acknowledged.

The Presiding Judge questions the defendant concerning particulars of his person...

István Lakatos, the defendant, in essence states in answer to the questions put to him: He has understood the accusation but pleads not guilty.

*

The minutes of my lower court hearing, which were never signed by me, consist of about sixty closely typed pages. In the first half, in response to questions from the judge and prosecutor, I state fundamentally that which I had previously written in the documents pertaining to the examination. The clerk reformulated my words in a primitive fashion, sometimes oversimplified to the point of stupidity. I quote just a few paragraphs from the first day of my testimony, things which I may well have said exactly as they are recorded.

On November 2, I went to the headquarters of the Writers' Union in Bajza utca. After Péter Veres' introductory words, the presidium, which at the time consisted of 25 members, was expanded by five. At the time of the first expansion, only five new members were elected, when Lajos Kassák took the floor and nominated me as well. Before the plenary session, I spoke of the need for Hungarian writers to become reconciled to one another, let them at last shake hands extended in friendship. In addition, I spoke of the glorious days of the revolution.

I looked on the events of October as a victorious Hungarian revolution

At the time of the events of October and November, I felt that the revolution was not a counter-revolution.

The City Court adjourned to February 4th, nine o'clock in the morning, when the examination of witnesses would take place.

The witness *Péter Kuczka* takes the stand. After being sworn in, he testifies:

"I came to know the defendant between 1948 and 1950, though I had seen his writings previous to that, and considered him a poet of considerable gifts. We did not become friends because I condemned him for his writings and his sectarian point of view. I met Lakatos only occasionally before 1956. On one occasion in 1956, I spoke to Lakatos about public affairs, walking in the street one night, and from this conversation it became clear that Lakatos was a patriotic and honourable man. He was not a Marxist, but a radical progressive anti-Marxist. His long silence was due to—or may be blamed on—the sectarian literary policy of the time. I was a member of the Writers' Union's presidium and party leadership. It was our endeavour to put an end to the sectarian policy, and, after 1953, we worked with those writers who did not support partisanship in literature. It is quite probable that István Lakatos would have received a Kossuth Prize given his talents."

The Presiding Judge shows the witness a copy of the poem *To the Young*, on page 329.

The witness: "I was already familiar with this poem by Lakatos. I would like to note that I do not like Lakatos's poetry because it is not concrete. For clarity's sake, let me mention that world literature has two fundamental directions: the concrete and the abstract. Lakatos' manner of expression is the latter, while mine is the former. If I had written this poem, I would have used the phrase 'we shall overthrow' from the outset... because the task of humanity is a dual one, both constructive and destructive. My interpretation is in accordance with dialectical theory..."

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There is no need for me to quote from the testimony of the other witnesses; they said basically what they had said earlier at the time of the examination in Fő utca. Ultimately, the prosecution was unable to use the testimony of any of the witnesses in my conviction.

In addition to my poems and inconsequential articles, the famous proclamation of the Writers' Union, one of the most thoroughly thought-out, boldest propositions of the revolution of 1956, was the second argument put forward by the prosecution. I presented "Hungarian Intellectuals Speak to the People" to one of our meetings, and it became the official formulation of our group's platform. Though I condensed and altered it somewhat with the help of Gyula Illyés and László Németh, the presidium considered it to be my work. Naturally, the witnesses described it as a collaboration.

Thirty five years after the event, I can reveal that Miklós Mészöly drafted it, perhaps with the help of Balázs Lengyel, Géza Ottlik, or Ágnes Nemes Nagy. The document was always of particular interest to the investigating authorities; they interrogated me about it for weeks. Naturally, I did not even think of mentioning the name of my good friend Miklós Mészöly in this connection. It could be said that I took the blame for him, just as he would have done for me had our positions be reversed.

I only mention this to emphasize that, in addition to all the other honourable actions of the reform communists, the revolution also exhibited a current of distinctly civil, democratic values.

TB 8060/1958/10 **Budapest City Court**

In the name of the People's Republic!

On November 2, 4, and 11, 1958, the Budapest City Court, sitting in camera, reached and, the next day, announced the following verdict:

The defendant, *István Lakatos*, detained since the thirteenth day of March—born April 26, 1927 at Bicske, a Budapest resident (VIII. Práter u. 59.), a Hungarian citizen, native language Hungarian, married, childless, writer by profession, monthly salary prior to detainment cca Ft 1500, holding a university degree, unpropertied, parents István Lakatos and Margit Gaszt, with no prior convictions, *has been found guilty* of the crime of participation in activity intended to overthrow the legal order of the people's democracy.

In the light of this, the court sentences him to

1) 2 (two) years and 10 (ten) months in prison as a primary punishment;

2) 3 (three) years deprivation of certain rights as defined by law, and

3) Partial confiscation of property, to the value of Ft 500 (five hundred) as a secondary punishment.

The time spent by the defendant in detention from the thirteenth day of March, 1957, to the present, shall be deducted in its entirety from the prison term, as specified here.

The court orders that all documents appended to these—manuscripts prepared by the defendant and other documents considered in reaching the verdict—shall be confiscated.

The Court orders the defendant to reimburse the State for the expenses of these proceedings—both those hitherto incurred and all possible expenses that may arise in future.

Reasons adduced:

The defendant took part in the September general meeting of the Writers' Union... and spoke in the name of those writers who had hitherto been silent... he proposed that various schools of thought have a voice in the running of the journals... that non-Marxist writers be also heard, that is those who do not stand on the foundations of socialist realism. The defendant wrote his poem *To the Young* in 1949.... By changing "Moscow" to "Warsaw," the defendant wished to set up the events in Poland as an example to be followed... The result of his second correction is that the verse expressed that we will overthrow the new world if necessary, which by logical extension refers to the socialist world system... At the same time, the defendant wrote another article, about the multiparty system, in which he states that he does not consider a one-party democratic system to be a true democracy... István Lakatos fully acknowledged these actions both at the hearing and to the investigating authorities... in spite of this, the defendant pleads not guilty... The defendant, who is well-educated, was fully aware of the weight of these actions.

Budapest District Attorney's Office
To: Presiding Judge of the City Court, Budapest
1958 Secret File, B. 040

I here present the argument in support of the appeal filed against sentence Tb. I 8060/1958 passed on István Lakatos for the crime of participation in activity directed towards the overthrow of the people's democratic state order.

The City Court correctly determined the facts of the case based on a consideration of the evidence. However, from this correct determination of the facts, it has drawn an incorrect conclusion regarding the danger posed by the

defendant to society. The defendant was engaged in his activity over a long period, and did not cease from it even after the armed suppression of the counter-revolution. His poem entitled *To the Young* appeared in the counter-revolutionary press, where its blatantly inflammatory content received a wide audience.

In its examination of the circumstances of the crime, the Court neglected to consider aggravating circumstances, that the defendant possesses greater-than-average intellectual capacities and education, and hence that he should have been conscious of the criminal aspect of his acitivites.

In the light of all these factors—although I do not consider the application of BTA. paragraph 51 to be counter to the law—the given punishment is not in keeping with the many-sided social danger evident in the defendant's activities.

Budapest, September 28, 1958

Dr Róbert Rónai, Prosecuting Counsel

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Two of the non-communists who were awarded great honours—even in political life—for their services to the Communist Party state before 1956 were personal acquaintances of mine: the peasant author Péter Veres, and the ethnographer Gyula Ortutay.

Péter Veres read my works, and, if he happened to look in at editorial offices or the Writers' Union, he would always come over to me and bring up his favourite topic:

"The greatest sin of a poet is eclecticism. A writer should have a well thought-out, unified world view, and a durable, individual voice."

Right away we would begin to debate this. Why could I not have two or even three world views, determined by my different moods and tonalities of voice?

Péter Veres abandoned me regretfully, but at least kept track of me. József Darvas was president of our union for years without our ever speaking a word to each other or my turning to him for any reason.

Ortutay seemed to be of an entirely different kind. He never made me feel the enormous gulf between his social position and my outcast status. He was fond of power, and strutted about in the highest posts, all the while despising the products of official literature, since he was an educated, perceptive reader in spite of the compromises he made. He showed some sort of friendship toward me. Once in a while, though rarely, he invited me to his lovely apartment in the Pasarét district, to talk about poetry and books—just the two of us. I had the feeling that he was secretly drawn to that poetry which at the time, half-suppressed, lurked in the half-shadows.

Before my lower court hearing, a common acquaintance of ours, perhaps Gábor Devecseri or Dezső Keresztury, turned to him for help to make sure that the sentence was not too severe. At the time, he was the General Secretary of the Patriotic People's Front, a member of the Presidential Council, and Rector of the University. Ortutay promised all he could, but I still got three years.

After the verdict, my wife visited Ortutay, since he had promised a better result.

He was truly outraged, and promptly phoned Géza Szénási, the Chief Public Prosecutor.

"Géza my friend, this is not what we agreed on at the Korean reception. I asked you emphatically to let Lakatos go. What he did was a pardonable crime. We have enough trouble with Déry, Háy, and their crowd being locked up; our international reputation is so bad that it is unpleasant for me to travel to the West—not to mention the hanging of Imre Nagy. It does more harm than good if we start alienating the bourgeois class to which Lakatos belongs."

After a moment, he turned to my wife.

"There is nothing to worry about, madam. Szénási is going to put Ferenc Rákos to shame, and your husband will get a reduced sentence on appeal."

This was also a way of arriving at a verdict after 1958. Whenever possible, the responsible parties received no written instructions; rather, lives and destinies were determined in the course of conversation, over a brandy at a reception, or even on the phone.

Naturally, after my release, I called on Ortutay and thanked him for his help.

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Office of the Chief Public Prosecutor
To the Supreme Court, Budapest

I hereby send, for the purpose of further action, the documents of the case brought against István Lakatos for the crime of participation in activities directed against the legal order of the people's democratic state.

I shall submit my appraisal pertaining to legal redress at the appeal hearing. I hereby rescind my appeal on the grounds of aggravating circumstances.

Budapest, October 20, 1958

Dr. Ferenc Rákos, Director of Division

The Supreme Court of the Hungarian People's Republic
T. B. 58/1958/12
TOP SECRET!

In the name of the People's Republic!

The Supreme Court of the Hungarian People's Republic in Budapest, sitting in closed court as an appeal court on November 26th, 1958, announced the following verdict on November 27th:

The verdict of the Budapest City Court in the case of István Lakatos, the accused, has been altered (Tb. I. 8060/1958/10), in that the prison sentence imposed on the defendant István Lakatos has been reduced to one (1) year and ten (10) months. The time spent by the defendant in preliminary detention since the lower court announced its verdict shall be reckoned as part of the prison sentence.

Reasons adduced: The criminal action consists of those articles and poems which the defendant made available for publication by the journal *Igazság* during the counter-revolution. The defendant wrote both poems before the

counter-revolution, and both were printed then. These poems appeareed in the journal *Igazság,* with small alterations, making reference to the counter-revolution. Another aspect of the criminal activity was the activity of the defendant in taking part in the drafting of the proclamation of the Writers' Union, which was published after November 4th.

There is no indication that the defendant had any role in the preparation of the counter-revolution. The defendant had no role in the intellectuals' revolutionary council, and exhibited no concrete participation in the creation of the "Proclamation" published on November 20.

The address of the defendant at the general meeting of the Writers' Union on November 2 was exceptionally moderate and conciliatory. The emphasis was not on whether the party organization should have a role within the Union, but rather that an aggravation of the debates between communist and non-communist writers was not appropriate at the time, and it was in the interest of the former to dispense with friction and create an atmosphere of tranquillity.

The writings of the defendant supported the counter-revolution. The Writers' Union's declaration, of many points, however, in the drafting of which the defendant also played a part, was a serious manifestation of the ideas of the counterrevolution. Hence the lower court was not in error to classify the defendant's actions under BHŐ, section 1, paragraph 2.

Regarding the person of the defendant, the Supreme Court did not agree with the prosecution that any non-Marxist writer belongs to the enemy camp. The defendant is not a conscious counter-revolutionary in the sense of desiring either fascism or imperialism. The Supreme Court sees the defendant as fundamentally a believer in humanism and human freedom, albeit that he understands these concepts wrongly.

Taking these points into consideration, as well as the circumstances under which the lower court reached its verdict, and rejecting the argument of aggravation through "accumulations", the Supreme Court finds that a shorter prison sentence than that determined by the lower court would be appropriate. Judging from the personality of the defendant, one may hope that the shorter prison sentence will have an educational effect so that in future he will approach the new phenomena of a new life for what they are.

In the light of the above, the Supreme Court has reduced the duration of imprisonment to one year and ten months.

Budapest, December 27, 1958.

Dr Pál Simor, Presiding Judge
Dr György Okolicsányi, also for judge
Dr Jenő Baksay, who was unable to sign.

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I spent the remainder of my term as a rope-maker in the exceptionally strict Márianosztra Correctional Institution, established for particularly dangerous class-alien elements.

Gabriel Ronay

The Indian Connection

As Hungary marked with fitting dignity the anniversary of the 1956 revolution last October, three men involved in a Scarlet Pimpernel operation during the street battles with the Soviet army met for the first time in thirty-five years. It was an extraordinary reunion for Árpád Göncz, now the President of a democratic Hungary, M. A. Rahman, a distinguished Indian diplomat accredited in Budapest in 1956, and Gabriel Ronay, a *Times* journalist and author, who was an undergraduate at the time of the uprising. The meeting was arranged by András B. Hegedűs, then director of the Commission for Historical Justice. The three men's intention in 1956 was to inform the United Nations Security Council of the appalling Soviet army atrocities as Moscow was drowning the Hungarian uprising in blood. It was a dangerous assignment in which the slightest mistake could have had dire consequences. Now the wheel has come full circle and the then undergraduate recounts his role in the operation.

At 9 p.m. on October 23, 1956, the ÁVH (the secret police) guarding Budapest radio station opened fire on the thousands of students demanding that our 14 points for democratic renewal be read over the national radio. An army unit sent by the Stalinist regime as reinforcement refused to fire on us and handed us their weapons. A peaceful march for free elections and multi-party democracy had been turned by the Communist Party into an armed uprising. Halfway through the battle for the radio I and a friend drove to the industrial heartland of Csepel with a car-load of hastily printed leaflets urging the nightshift workers at an armaments factory to come out on strike and join us with their weapons. These were, according to the communist regime, capital offences and, three days after a taxing examination in comparative philology, they launched me on a brand new career.

During the twelve heady days that followed, I was looking for a like-minded political grouping among the mushrooming parties. I was drawn to the liberal middle-of-the-road Party of Hungarian Youth, backed by General Pál Maléter, a hero of the anti-Nazi resistance and of the October Revolution, who was made Defence Minister in the Imre Nagy government. On November 3, I was called to a smart villa on the Andrássy út thoroughfare for the founding meeting of the party's daily, *Október 23*. As I spoke Russian, German, French, and Rumanian, and had some journalistic experience, I was asked to cover foreign news.

But at dawn the next day, November 4, tens of thousands of Soviet troops with more than a thousand tanks attacked Budapest. General Maléter, lured into a NKVD trap under the pretext of negoti-

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Gabriel Ronay, *author, broadcaster and journalist, left Hungary in 1956 and is on the staff of* The Times. *His latest book,* The Lost King of England—The East European Adventures of Edward the Exile, *was published by Bowdell & Brewer in Britain and the U.S. in 1990.*

ating a Soviet withdrawal from Hungary, was already a prisoner, and our editorial office was shot up by Soviet tanks.

With many of the leaders of the revolution and the lawful government seized or in Yugoslav sanctuary, I wanted to tell the world of Hungary's agony. I was sickened by the carnage and full of anger. The list of Soviet army atrocities against a defenceless city was growing by the day, but with a curfew and a ring of steel thrown around Hungary by Soviet combat divisions, there was no obvious way of informing the West. The Iron Curtain was being slammed down again and while the tens of thousands of Hungarians fleeing to Austria were giving their accounts of the Soviet bloodbath, I knew that uncorroborated refugee stories were treated with skepticism.

It seemed to me that, if the civilized world was to heed our cries and in its moral outrage take action against Soviet imperialism, then it must be provided with detailed and reliable information. I also became convinced that this information must reach the United Nations Security Council, then discussing Hungary's plight. But how to gather proof of atrocities under the barrels of Soviet tanks, and, with communications to the West cut, how to pass the files on to New York? I had no organization, no funds, and, as a student of no national or international standing to make the UN listen to me.

Chance pointed the way. Although classed as a "politically unreliable" philology student, I had been permitted to work as a freelance interpreter for the Institute of Cultural Relations. A couple of German artists and Rumanian writers were stranded in the Grand Hotel on Margaret Island in the Danube and I kept visiting my charges during the fighting to make sure that they were all right. Most foreign envoys in the city had also sought refuge at the hotel from the indiscriminate Soviet shelling and shooting. My action during a potentially ugly incident helped to establish my bona fides with the foreign representatives.

When the first Russian foot patrol arrived outside the Grand Hotel's all-glass entrance, the frightened envoys lined up inside and watched with horror as one Russian soldier with his sub-machine gun flung across his chest got stuck in the revolving door. Clearly he had never seen a revolving door and began to scream, urging his comrades to free him from this "bourgeois snatching machine". Having arrived at the entrance in the middle of this frightening scene, I told the trapped soldier in Russian to drop his gun and spoke soothingly to the rest of the patrol who were by then ready to shoot up the hotel. The Russian got out of the revolving door, the patrol lowered their guns and the relieved diplomatic corps voiced its appreciation. I got the introductions I needed, and the envoys, eager for news from the racked city, turned to me for information. I found myself giving daily "press briefings". But I soon realized that the dispatches of Latin American and other Third World envoys would not carry sufficient weight in the Security Council. With the British, American and French legations watched by secret policemen, and Suez preoccupying London and Paris, I focused my attention on the Indian envoy, M. A. Rahman. He was, I reasoned, the representative of non-aligned India, with high credibility in the UN and potentially the best possible channel to the Security Council, then under Indian chairmanship. When Mr Rahman, who had just arrived in Budapest, invited me to act as his "curfew guide" and Russian-Hungarian interpreter, my lines of communications to the outside world were opened. Herr Drechsler from Cologne, a West German concert pianist, also stranded in the Grand Hotel, offered to act as our driver. The team to check and verify reports of Soviet atrocities was now in place. A latterday Scarlet Pimpernel operation was being set in motion.

University colleagues, friends and acquaintances informed me over the telephone about summary street executions, rounding up of innocent bystanders for deportation to the Soviet Union and other similar incidents. The phone kept ringing: women and children, believing that their defencelessness would protect them in the bread queues on Üllői út, were machine-gunned by trigger-happy tank gunners; a young father forced to venture out of his flat for milk for his small child, was shot dead as he crossed Wesselényi utca; Guszev utca was suddenly closed at either end by Soviet lorries and all young men were taken away; railwaymen reported later that batches of young men were being deported to camps near Mukachevo in the Ukraine. I would ring Mr Rahman and, if the incident was still verifiable, Herr Drechsler would drive us there in the small embassy car with large CD plates.

The list of atrocities grew and I was confident those which were verified by eye-witness accounts would get into the Indian envoy's dispatches. But the immediate problem was how to get the first file out of the country. The Indian legation had no direct radio contact with the West, so the only way was to take it to the Austro-Hungarian border and hand it over physically to the Indian ambassador to Austria. However, there was a curfew, the country was in the grip of a general strike and the highway to the Austrian border crossing point of Hegyeshalom was teeming with newly-arrived Soviet Central Asian tank crews who usually opened fire first and asked questions later. Nevertheless, it had to be done.

With the help of a Russian military *laissez passer*, which I managed to obtain from an impressionable junior officer at the Soviet military headquarters after some delicate conversations about the freedom of movement of non-aligned diplomats, we set off for the border towards the end of November. For greater safety, we covered the entire roof of the car with a huge Indian flag and hoped that our luck would hold.

The drive to the border was a surreal experience. We were stopped time and again at gunpoint by bewildered and starving Soviet troops begging for bread. Their officers pleaded for cigarettes. They did not know where they were, their supplies were probably still somewhere in the Soviet Union and they were left to fend for themselves. What was even more worrying was that their political officers were also way behind the events and the troops were spouting forth their last indoctrination lessons. Just a few miles outside Budapest, soldiers of a large tank and armoured vehicle convoy said they were "on their way to Berlin to put down a fascist uprising". Some 70 miles to the West, Central Asian troops said in broken Russian that they had come "to the aid of their Muslim brethren attacked by the imperialists", and asked to be shown "the canal". Clearly their political commissars, who had been preparing these "volunteer troops" for a possible Soviet intervention at Suez, had not had time to change the record in the indoctrination machine. So I showed the baffled Kirghiz and Khazakh soldiers to the nearest stream. But there were no British imperialists or Muslim brethren to be seen anywhere.

At Hegyeshalom there was a solitary Hungarian soldier at the barrier and an army of Western journalists on the Austrian side waiting for some signs of Russian oppression to report. But there wasn't a single Russian soldier around to be photographed. However, in the customs building, where I went to ask for permission for Mr Rahman to cross over to the Austrian side in order to hand over his dispatches to his colleague, by chance I opened the wrong door. Inside I spotted, behind a whitewashed window with peepholes, twenty or so Russian troops, some training their guns on the border barrier. Anyone unwise to sprint across

to Austria would have been picked off by them. On the surface, an independent Hungary's socialist border was guarded by a Hungarian frontier guard. Nevertheless, against all odds, the first batch of independent eyewitness accounts of Russian atrocities was passed over to the West. The rest, I felt, was up to Delhi.

The first leg of our mission was accomplished. However, the material-gathering trips in the capital had attracted the attention of the Soviet military authorities, and the call by two Russian officers at the Grand Hotel heralded the start of a new round of adventures in situations where a wrong approach or injudicious remark would have had fatal consequences. The officers asked me to tell Rahman that the city was at peace, there was no general strike, the workers were happy and the factories were a hive of activity. Only a handful of "misguided students and fascist hooligans in the pay of Western imperialists" were trying to disrupt the peaceful building of socialism, they went on.

I protested and told them that was simply not true. The general strike against the Soviet intervention, I stressed, was complete and the people were not prepared to have anything to do with the communists, who were being reimposed by armed force. As for the "imperialist bogey", the only imperialist force in Hungary was the Soviet army. The officers became very angry at this and called me a "fascist thug" and said menacingly that they would talk to me later. In my turn I resolutely rebuffed the "fascist" slur.

To prove to Mr Rahman that everything was just as they had said, the officers promised they would call at 10 a.m. next morning and take him on a tour of "Budapest factories engaged in peaceful, socialist work". For greater emphasis, one of the Russians took out his party card and swore on it that he was telling the truth. Mr Rahman asked him: "Is that your Bible you are swearing on?"

To defuse the situation, he ordered a bottle of vodka. Round followed round. Unexpectedly, Mr Rahman challenged the officer who had sworn on his party card to a bout of arm wrestling. When the inebriated Russian wrestled the Indian envoy's arm flat on the table, Mr Rahman said: "That's what you want to do to this nation". The Russian officers left without a word.

Needless to say that the two officers did not show up the next morning. The conducted tour of happy, socialist factories was off. But the following day Russian officers called at my house when, luckily, I was not at home. Clearly, my Scarlet Pimpernel days were over. There was no time to waste and, without a chance to say goodbye to my family or Mr Rahman, I fled the country and, at the invitation of the British Council, I came to Britain to continue my studies.

But the imperative to tell the world that Soviet troops were drowning our revolution made others, people of greater political weight, seek channels of communications. By a curious coincidence, István Bibó, a minister in Imre Nagy's government, and his intellectual circle, had also turned to Mr Rahman. Their contact man, Árpád Göncz, a hero of the anti-Nazi resistance in 1944, picked up the threads where I had left off, though he knew nothing of my own work. He kept up the flow of information of Soviet oppression to the UN, passed on desperate appeals by leading intellectuals to Nehru requesting Indian mediation and, in a daring coup, even managed to get Imre Nagy's memoirs to the West. "In those months, the Indian legation in Budapest became the embassy of the revolution", Mr Göncz said last month.

Inevitably, Mr Göncz and his circle were arrested and only Nehru's personal intervention in Moscow saved them from execution. Mr Göncz served six years of the life sentence imposed on him, in János Kádár's jails.

After the collapse of Communism in Central-Eastern Europe, Mr Göncz was

elected president of the new Hungary in recognition of his political steadfastness and heroic action in 1956. Last year, Mr Rahman was awarded the Order of the Star for his valiant help to Hungary in 1956, and the Indian government made a gift of all the Indian diplomatic dispatches of the period to the re-born Hungarian state. President Göncz also invited Mr Rahman to attend the 35th anniversary celebrations of the revolution last October, and András B. Hegedüs invited me to join the other two in Budapest.

So it came about that a head of state, a retired Indian diplomat and a *Times* journalist met for the first time in thirty-five years in the Hungarian Parliament.

Although all's well that ends well, there was an unexpected sting in the tail. During our long conversation in the president's office, Mr Rahman told me that he had just discovered a hitherto secret cable from Krishna Menon, the pro-communist Indian defence minister, during the Hungarian revolution. It was addressed to Mr Rahman's immediate superior: "I have had enough of these (Rahman's) reports from Budapest. I don't want to see another one again."

Our hazardous undertaking to inform the UN was apparently choked off in midstream by Delhi's own political imperatives and fear of Moscow's wrath.

CORRIGENDUM

Unfortunately, owing to a computer file mix-up, the last paragraph of András Gerő's "March l5th: The Fortunes of a National Day" (NHQ *126, p. 113 ff) was left out. It is printed below with apologies to the author and readers.*

That is where we stand in the ups and downs of March 15th. Ever since it was spontaneously chosen by Hungarians as their holiday, it has suffered all the trials and tribulations a holiday can go through: persecution, denial, nationalization, expropriation, and demotion. Succeeding governments have done to it all the things that a State can do to the will of the poeple. For all that, even though March 15 was now to the fore and now ignored, it has managed to retain its original mandate: it is the holiday of freedom and national independence of all Hungarians. Despite the will of the powers that be. Just as in 1848, it will remain nonconformist, rebellious and revolutionary.

János M. Rainer

The Reprisals

When demanding the prosecution of those responsible for the outrages of communism, the image the man in the street usually has is of unarmed people gunned down during the 1956 Revolution and of the victims of revenge the state took afterwards. Considerably fewer recall those who were killed during the Rákosi regime in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, even though their total figure—which is still not known precisely—is certainly much higher. In other respects, too, the oppressive measures of the Rákosi regime affected many more people. The indiscriminate hostility displayed by the regime towards everybody could almost be called a war on society.

A social psychologist would probably explain this apparent disparity by suggesting that in some ways the public settled accounts with the oppressors in 1956: no matter how briefly, they had, after all, toppled the hated regime. There could even be a grain of truth in the claim that the Kádár regime's bashful silence over the "unlawful practices" of the 1950s was rooted precisely in the fact that the rehabilitation of the victims—even in cases where they happened to be party members in good standing—was not the work of the party but had been brought about by the revolution, which finally turned against the entire detested system of communism.

However, as far as the victims of the 1956 revolution and of the reprisals that followed were concerned, justice was not perceived to have been done. The subsequent executions and the terror, together with Kádár's personal responsibility in the matter, remained the number one taboo of the Kádár era. One of the turning points in the Hungarian political transition occurred in 1989: Imre Pozsgay labelled the events of 1956 as a popular uprising, and not a counter-revolution, as had been compulsory before. In 1989, people were finally able to learn the distressing details of the retaliation—facts that had been hushed up even more thoroughly than the memory of the revolution itself. However, the peaceful character of the political transition, as well as the powerful insistence on the rule of law, which was shared by all democratic forces, did not permit any sort of "revolutionary settlement". The combination

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János M. Rainer's *publications include pioneering statistics on the reprisals following the 1956 Revolution (in samizdat 1986-89), and a book on the 1953-59 debates in the literary press. He is currently at work on a biography of Imre Nagy.*

of crimes unpunished, feelings of remorse and guilt over forgetfulness, people's natural moral sense, the lacunae of the democratic legal system, all these form the constituents of many a painful dilemma.

The task of the historian is to discuss past events, to describe them as accurately as possible, and to try to explain them. In this respect, the events and the aftermath of 1956 still leave historians much work to do. The present paper can only provide an outline of an overview of the repression after the revolution. The social background is then discussed, and a number of facts are given to indicate the scale of retaliation.

The reprisals following the revolution can be divided into four stages of uneven duration, corresponding to the political priorities of the Kádár regime. János Kádár's promise, made on November 4, 1956, that nobody would be persecuted for participating in the revolution, can only be interpreted as a propaganda trick meant to smooth the puppet government's way to power. Had the Kádár regime been faced with less firm society-wide opposition, and had it been backed by more collaborators and larger political forces, the retaliation would probably have been less severe. As soon as it became apparent, however, that a political line more or less similar to the previous one had been helped to power by the Soviet army (and that was evident from the moment that Kádár was chosen as the future leader of the country), it also became clear that retaliation was inevitable.

1. In the first period, which lasted from November 4 to the beginning of December 1956, the main objective was to end armed resistance. At that time the Hungarian political leadership still depended for everything on the Soviet Union. In the first few weeks restoration of order was directed from the wings by Malenkov, Suslov and Aristov, three members of the Soviet Communist Party leadership. However, initially even the carrying out of directives was entrusted to Soviet troops, the emergency serving as an excuse. People captured bearing arms were sometimes shot on the spot by Soviet soldiers. Most of them were, however, taken to prisons controlled by the Soviet army. At that time summary procedures had still not been introduced and the Soviet commanders, as well as János Kádár, held talks with the leaders of non-armed resistance groups (for example, with members of the Central Workers' Council, who were then in the process of organizing a general strike). On the other hand, on November 5, 1956 twelve members of the Workers' Council of Borsod County were taken to Ungvár (Uzhhorod, Soviet Union) in chains, for their unwillingness to recognize the Kádár government, without first speaking personally with members of the government. There were even examples of the swift abandonment of temporary measures, when the latter did not serve the primary goal of general pacification and the ending of armed resistance. Thus young fighters deported in early November to the Soviet Union came to be brought back to Hungary. The situation was somewhat different outside Budapest, where the literal and physical destruction of the revolutinary adminis-

tration by a growing number of paramilitary squads began well ahead of orders from the centre.

2. In early December 1956, an MSZMP (Magyar Szocialista Munkás Párt—Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) statement was issued, labelling the entire revolution a "counter-revolution". At the same time, official paramilitary squads were formed and the apparatus of the Ministry of Interior was reorganized. Since armed resistance had by then been virtually eliminated, the withdrawal of Soviet military and state security forces from the machinery of retaliation became possible. (Naturally, these forces remained present in the background.) The next job was to do away with unarmed forms of resistance and to deter people from peaceful protests, such as strikes and the distribution of leaflets. Following the MSZMP decision of December 1956, all the still active revolutionary organizations were proscribed, including the Workers' Council of Greater Budapest, regional workers' councils, and local revolutionary committees. During the first few days of December, two hundred deputies of the various workers' councils were arrested and martial law with summary jurisdiction was introduced. A large number of arrests were made in several surges. It was then that the institutional framework of the machinery of retaliation was established and decrees were passed to legalize the proceedings. In this phase of deterrence the main objective of the reprisals was still the neutralization of the forces of resistance. Although prisons were filling up, and internment camps liquidated in 1953 were reactivated, a decision of what to do with the huge number of people detained had evidently still not been made. Dozens of young people captured bearing weapons had been shot out of hand. József Dudás and János Szabó, the leaders of a political and an armed resistance group had been sentenced to death. However, the majority of court cases progressed very slowly. (In February 1957, members of the government blamed the staff of the courts and the public prosecutor's office for the slow progress.) This period ended in March 1957, with János Kádár's visit to Moscow, where he came to an agreement with the Soviet leadership on speeding up the process of mass retaliation. It was also decided there that retaliation should not be given publicity, and that hearings be held in secret. Growing international protest must have contributed to that decision. In early April 1957, following Kádár's return from Moscow, a start to mass retaliation was approved, first by the executive committee of the MSZMP and then by its Central Committee. At the same time, a resolution, demanding the prosecution of Imre Nagy and his associates was passed. By the time these decisions were taken, there was no resistance to speak of in the country, save for a few isolated incidents. Local party organizations had virtually eliminated workers' councils in factories, even though these councils were still legal at the time.

3. The next phase, which could rightly be called the period of mass retaliation, lasted from April 1957 until about the spring of 1959. Not only people taking part in the resistance after November 4 were summoned to face people's

tribunals—an institution set up in consequence of the two MSZMP resolutions already mentioned—but great numbers involved in the revolution itself. That even included members of the Commmunist Party's internal opposition, who had allegedly been responsible for "preparing" the revolution. After April 1957 the police carried out another major round-up, which was followed by thousands of people being charged. Summary proceedings ended in the late autumn of 1957, but investigations in thousands of cases went on for months—in some cases for over a year. Courts and the public prosecutor's office were simply unable to cope with the amount of work. In 1957 alone, over 20,000 people were prosecuted on political charges. Of these the courts "managed" to convict only slightly more than 6,000. In a certain sense the partial amnesty announced in the spring of 1959 concluded this period. There were a number of factors—the public's throwing in the towel, the international repercussions of the terror, emergence of new objectives such as the collectivization of agriculture, the growing tensions caused by the "over-zealous" apparatus of the Ministry of Interior, which, taken together, persuaded the political leaderhip to relax the terror. It did not, however, mean completely abandoning the use of force: it was precisely during the time of the "minor amnesty" that a number of intellectuals were convicted for their part in the resistance after the revolution. Indeed, political trials occasionally took place later, too.

4. With only few exceptions, there were no prosecutions for offences related to the 1956 revolution between the spring of 1959 and that of 1963. In general, the number of political trials declined in this period. (Nevertheless, it was then that important political trials involving Catholic priests and members of their congregations were held.) The special legal institutions established in the spring of 1957 were abolished (that of internment in April 1960, and of the people's tribunals in April 1961), and a considerable number of ex-ÁVH-officers (ÁVH—State Security Branch during the Rákosi era) were dismissed from the political police between 1961 and 1962. Although these latter dismissals were due to atrocities they had committed against prominent communists before 1953, the officers concerned were not charged—and certainly not for their acts after 1956. The Kádár leadership regarded the apparatus of the Ministry of Interior as a potential source of a "Stalinist restoration" and, as such, dangerous from the viewpoint of "de-Stalinization", a process that was gaining momentum in the early 1960s. It was for this reason that the "purge" of the Ministry of Interior was thought necessary.

In addition, there was an important foreign political consideration, which also urged the government to put an end to the reprisals. The "Hungarian issue" had been kept on the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations by the United States ever since 1956. The end of arrests was not considered a sufficient reason for removing it. Nor were the partial amnesties of 1959 and 1960, which applied only to those who were serving short prison sentences. As a result of secret negotiations, the General Assembly no longer discussed the Hungarian issue from the autumn of 1962. In March 1963 a "general amnesty"

was announced and that, indeed, resulted in the release of most of the victims of the retaliation following 1956. Neither the international community, nor the Hungarian public, by then thoroughly intimidated, welcoming even the slightest relief, raised their voice in support of those who had fought and had been sentenced to prison on "murder" charges—the amnesty did not apply to them. Those who were released often faced discrimination of various kinds for many years to come: they could not get a passport, they were kept under surveillance, were barred from practicing their profession, and their confiscated property was not returned to them.

In December 1956, Hungarian paramilitary squads (knowns as *"pufajkások"* on account of their Russian type quilted jacket), carried out arrests and interrogations in the place of Soviet troops who had previously been used for such actions. These squads were recruited from ex-ÁVH-personnel, officers of the People's Army, as well as from Communist Party officials removed from their posts in factories and institutions during the revolution. Although taking orders directly from the MSZMP leadership, the chiefs of these squads enjoyed a considerable measure of independence. In early 1957 the trained policemen amongst them and the network of informers were transferred to the reorganized Political Investigations Department of the Ministry of the Interior. This department also took over the old hands of the ÁVH—the most dreaded organization before 1956—almost to the last man. To "supervise" them, a few party officials were assigned to the department, mainly selected from those former leaders of DISZ (the communist youth organization before 1956) who had proved loyal to the party in 1956. The political leadership tried to preserve the appearance of legality and prohibited the methods used by the ÁVH in the 1950s. However, outside the capital—and even within it, if the victims were not among the better known figures—beating and torture regularly occurred.

In late 1956 and in early 1957, the ranks of the judges and public prosecutors were purged. Having learned from the unlawful practices of the early 1950s and from the subsequent overturning of verdicts, a number of judges and prosecutors went through a moral crisis and openly rebelled. They did not wish to take part in further political trials. These defiant judges and prosecutors were dismissed, and a great many of them ended up by being barred from the practice of their profession for years. The ranks of lawyers were also screened. For "special" political trials a secret and exclusive list of attorneys was drawn up, and the accused were able to choose their defence lawyers only from this list.

The person "officially" in charge of the machinery of retaliation was the Minister of the Interior—Ferenc Münnich between November 1956 and March 1957, Béla Biszku between 1957 and 1961, and János Pap between 1961 and 1963. The indictments, which directly or indirectly also projected the sentence, were prepared for the public prosecutor's office by the political police. However, the Minister of the Interior was only responsible for operative work, he was supervised by the Central Committee's secretary assigned to the duty (György

Marosán, followed by Béla Biszku), and ultimately by the Executive Committee—and later by the Politburo—of the MSZMP. The latter discussed the question of calling to account on more than a dozen occasions between 1957 and 1958. The supreme political body's authority extended from the formulation of general principles right down to the prosecution of individuals. The MSZMP Central Committee also participated in the making of the most momentous decisions. In matters connected to retaliation, it was usually the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party, János Kádár himself, who presented the subjects to the party leadership, and—to the best of my knowledge—the proposed resolutions were accepted by the leadership unanimously on every single occasion. The Politburo and the Central Committee held several meetings to deal with the most important cases—the prosecution of Imre Nagy and his associates, for example, which was delayed for eighteen months. Although the participants were careful not to say so explicitly, when they passed a unanimous decision "not to interfere with the course of justice", they knew perfectly well that this meant a death sentence for Prime Minister Nagy. Naturally, these decisions were made behind closed doors, the minutes of the Central Committee's meeting of December 1957, crucially important from the viewpoint of Imre Nagy's prosecution, were kept in János Kádár's personal safe right up to his death.

Based on estimates (since precise information is still not available), in the period of mass retaliation between late 1956 and 1959, at least thirty-five thousand people were charged with political "crimes". Even in those cases where the police closed the investigation without instituting legal proceedings, people spent a few weeks in detention. Twenty-six thousand persons were prosecuted, and the number of convictions was in the region of twenty-two thousand. The large majority were convicted for participating in the revolution or in the ensuing resistance. A smaller proportion of "political" cases concerned attempts to cross the border illegally.

Between 1957 and 1960 approximately thirteen thousand people were sent to the reopened internment camps (Tököl, Kistarcsa). Banishment from one's place of residence, summary dismissals (thus more than a thousand teachers were fired, primarily outside the capital), and police surveillance affected further tens of thousands of people. The total number of people suffering consequences of retaliation most certainly exceeded one hundred thousand, many more if the members of their families are included. Bearing in mind that a considerable proportion of those actively involved in the revolution left the country during the mass exodus of late 1956, one of the most striking features of the retaliation was its scale. Death sentences and imprisonment were only the apex of the pyramid, with those suffering milder forms of punishment at the base.

The other most important characteristic of the retaliation was its cruelty. Between December 1956 and the summer of 1961 (when the last death sentence was carried out), the number of executions can only be compared to the corresponding numbers in the darkest phase of the Rákosi era: to the best of my

knowledge, between 350 and 400. Of these, 280 to 300 were clear-cut political trials, where the charge was participation in the revolution. In nearly three-quarters of the cases the victims were young workers and soldiers in their twenties: armed freedom-fighters. Prison sentences were also severe: nearly half of those who had to face people's tribunals could expect a prison sentence of over 5 years. In occasional communiqués about the in camera hearings and in statements of politicians (as well as in the works of the Kádár regime's official historiographers published years later) the point was constantly made that people involved in "lynching and murder" were sentenced to death. The evidence suggests the opposite. People who had merely happened to be at the scene of the atrocities were sentenced to death for premeditated murder, on the strength of false testimony extorted from others.

The repression that followed the revolution was, in one respect, very different from the repression under the Rákosi regime. In a way, the Rákosi regime was at war with society as a whole. The range of their targets extended from "class-enemies" right to a certain group of top-ranking party officials. By contrast, the retaliation following the revolution had relatively well-defined targets, according to the form of their participation in the revolution and to their relationship to the Kádár regime's policy in the making. The following three groups were the prime targets:

1. Young and mostly unskilled urban workers and apprentices between the ages of 18 and 25, who either had actively fought in the revolution or had in some other way been connected with its fighting units. They accounted for a relatively small proportion of the total number of indictments, but most of those facing summary courts or people's tribunals belonged to this category. They were given the harshest sentences. Most of those who were not eligible for the last amnesty also came from this group, and a tragically large proportion of death sentences is associated with this category. They had chosen the most radical form of fight against Stalinism, and the regime assumed that its fiercest opponents might be amongst them. The assumption was probably correct: the former freedom fighters played an important role in most of the underground resistance groups after the fall of the revolution. On the other hand, those who had been actively involved in the fighting were also more likely to flee the country, therefore, the naivest, as well as the fiercest, elements of the opposition were given the harshest sentences, occasionally including people who had actually played a marginal role in the armed insurgence.

2. The greatest number of prosecutions involved members of the workers' committees, members of the revolutionary committees of local authorities and of other comparable institutions. In the majority of cases these people were workers, members of lower management, peasants and, to a smaller extent, professionals (teachers), and persons with considerable influence on their immediate surroundings. They formed that competent elite of local self-gov-

Waves of Exodus

A report compiled in the summer of 1957 by KSH, the Central Statistical Office of Hungary, has recently been published. It provides detailed information on the mass exodus that followed the 1956 revolution. According to the KSH files closed on February 10, 1957, 151,731 identified Hungarian citizens left the country in the wake of the revolution. This was far from the total number of those who left the country, as indeed the report itself admitted that according to the combined figures of the Yugoslav and Austrian Ministries of the Interior, 193,885 Hungarian refugees had been registered. The total number of Hungarian refugees associated with the 1956 revolution is usually put even higher: somewhere between 220,000 and 250,000.

What makes this KSH report, long kept secret, even more interesting is the inclusion of a detailed breakdown of the figure. It becomes clear, for example, that more than half of the refugees had left the country by the end of November 1956, and that another forty per cent crossed the border between December 1, 1956 and January 31, 1957. Another interesting piece of information is that after January 1, 1957 the refugees—or dissidents, as they were called in the official jargon of the time—crossed the Yugoslav rather than the Austrian frontier.

The report also shows that more than half of the refugees came from Budapest, and another thirty per cent from Transdanubia, the region west of the river Danube. In western Hungary an estimated 5 to 6 per cent of the urban population left: in Sopron this figure was as high as 12 per cent. In Budapest, a city that had over two million inhabitants at the time, more than four per cent of the population left: in the inner districts this figure exceeded 6 per cent.

Two-thirds of the refugees were men. Only one-third of male refugees were married, the comparative figure for females was one-half. It should be noted, however, that the figure for married men also included 8,000 men who had left without their wives. According to the official figures, over 20,000 were under fifteen. In certain unofficial estimates, at least another 10,000 children between the ages of 10 and 14 left the country. Almost nine-tenth of all refugees were under forty.

Workers made up two-thirds—and what a blow that was for the state of the proletariat! Two-thirds of the industrial workers who chose to leave the country were under thirty. In late 1956 and early 1957, sixteen per cent of Hungary's mechanics and twelve per cent of car mechanics left. One-quarter were professionals, and of these engineers accounted for the highest number: ten per cent of all the engineers in the country left after the revolution. However, when we look at engineers between the ages of 30 and 39, this figure rises to 25 per cent. Five per cent of qualified medical practitioners and two per cent of teachers chose the free West. More than ten per cent of students at universities or other institutions of higher learning left.

ICEM, the International Committee of European Migration, looked after the Hungarian refugees, directing them to various countries of reception. Most of the countries showed a willingness to adopt these refugees to an extent that had been uncommon before. Quite apart from political considerations, their youth and above-average qualifications made these refugees more acceptable—even to countries such as Switzerland. According to ICEM files, the number of Hungarian refugees registered with them had reached 172,732 by December 31, 1957. More than one-third of these refugees went directed to the USA and Canada. Australia accepted 10,000 Hungarians. In contrast, however, to earlier practice, a large proportion of the refugees stayed in Europe: 53 per cent. Great Britain received the highest ratio, followed by Switzerland and Germany.

István Riba

ernment which was brought to the surface by the revolution, literally within days. These were the people who were first to recognize the challenge of the revolutionary situation, they had the courage and the skill to take matters into their own hands, and did so under the constant democratic control of their immediate surroundings. (A revealing feature is that the majority of the members of the revolutionary workers' committees were reelected in mid- and late-November.) These people were typically democrats and socialists. Their political views had generally been formed in the coalition parties of the 1944-48 period, at the same time, a large number of these people came into a political conflict with the regime during the Stalinist era.

As a rule, members of the workers' committees were tried by ordinary courts and the sentences were usually less severe. However, the sheer volume of sentences, together with the large number of non-judicial measures, tested the endurance of this category. This was hardly a coincidence, either; in addition to the general intention of vengeance and intimidation, the foremost objective of the retaliation was the incapacitation and the destruction of this very socio-political section of society. The regime had every reason to assume that their moral and human integrity would make these people suitable to become the driving force in a future democratic movement.

3. The pre-1956 internal opposition within the party, and a number of left wing intellectuals associated with it, were perhaps not many, but characteristic and important. The majority of these people identified with the democratic and national goals of the revolution, and many of them became active participants of the resistance movement after November 4. At the same time, they had ample experiences of oppositional activities in a dictatorship before 1956, or even 1945. The main objectives of the Kádár regime included the elimination of these kinds of political activities, therefore, such people were given harsh sentences.

In addition to such immediate purposes as intimidation, the breaking of resistance and the gratification of the oppressive apparatus in compensation for the fright it had been given in October, the oppressive measures of the Kádár regime also served long-term goals. One such was to provide some kind of an explanation for the total collapse of the system in October 1956.

Retaliation was conducted so as to present the entire revolution as a plot, the work of a small but determined group of anti-communists and reactionaries, who succeeded by way of subversion and subterfuge. For that reason the prosecution was not expected to fabricate horror stories, as they had during the 1950s—although their experience in this matter was occasionally put to use to supplement certain cases. The main objective was the "proper interpretation" of the events, in other words the "criminalization" of the revolution. Thus, the criticism of the Communist Party's internal opposition was referred to in indictments and judgements as "conspiracy against the People's Republic", membership in revolutionary committees was termed as "participation in a movement aimed at the overthrow of the state", armed resistance against the

invaders became known as "murder and damage to collective property". Also, on account of some distant—perhaps even fictitious—ancestor, the accused could become an "ancient clerical fascist" and a reactionary, a black-marketeer, someone who had already been convicted in the 1950s for sabotage, the workers and peasants taking part in the revolution were made out to be "gaol-birds, lumpen elements, or kulaks".

Apart from the initial uncertainties and a few local incidents, retaliation was not expanded into a comprehensive campaign that swamped everyday life. The media published the sentences briefly, if at all. Those were show trials that were conducted behind closed doors. The local and national campaigns of White Books—brochures explaining the "outrages of counter-revolution"—soon died away, and the discussion of these "products" was dropped from the programme of seminars. People who were involved in the revolution could expect to be called to account, but as long as they held their tongues, they were left alone. In this the most important aim—at the same time the saddest result and consequence—of the repression manifested itself. The most active people, who had been mobilized by the revolution, were crushed, they had their spirits broken and were turned into social outcasts, both individually and collectively. As to the majority, their silence, the willingness to forget and to acquiesce, was rewarded by relative peace, and later by a relative prosperity.

With very few exceptions, people developed an attitude described by the psychologist Ferenc Mérei, himself an inmate of Kádár's prisons, as "national repression". Nobody ever said a word about the revolution, nor about the defeat, no one wanted to know about people in gaol, nor those released. The "peace" thus acquired by individuals opened the way for their upward social mobility, but destroyed social solidarity—the very thing that had manifested itself during the days of the revolution and the ensuing resistance with such primal force. A tragic consequence of this period, and specifically of the retaliation, was that all democratic forms of political activity became impossible for almost twenty years, until a new generation grew up.

Open or Closed Societies?

A Radio Interview with George Soros

Your foundation is present in almost all of the countries now in the process of transformation, you have friends and connections all over the region, you yourself play a part in the social and intellectual life of these countries. How do you see the transformation?

I look on this as a revolution which first peaked in 1989 when the Soviet empire collapsed, and again in 1991 when the Soviet Union itself collapsed. Historical processes of this kind occur relatively rarely, this is something similar to the French revolution or the revolutions of 1848 or 1917.

Can we speak of genuine revolutions? Could it be that, although the old power structure was transformed everywhere, in some places smashed, essential social changes will nevertheless not occur? That the old leaders will disappear, but everything will stay more or less the same?

That is out of question. The old régimes will certainly not survive. But what will follow them? That is the question. The collapse of communism is a *fait accompli*. The illusion I had—and which I think others had also—was that the collapse of communism would be followed by the emergence of open societies. Once we managed to break open that closed system, what else could happen? That was an illusion—which Gorbachev perhaps also entertained.

Why, do you take it as an accomplished fact that the collapse of communism will not lead to the emergence of open societies?

I would not say that. But we were forced to realize that an open society—democracy, pluralism, etc.—is a much more advanced and complicated organization than a closed society such as communism was, and the mere fact that this closed society has disintegrated does not mean that an open society will emerge automatically. This requires time—and help. And if there is no time and no help, then, instead of a superior system coming into being, the old one will linger on, eventually falling to pieces. Communism was a universal closed society. There is good reason to fear that smaller closed systems will emerge in the wake of communism: variations on the theme of nationalism.

George Soros *left Hungary in 1947 and now lives in New York City, where he manages the Quantum Fund. Starting with the Open Society Fund in New York, which offered scholarships to dissident intellectuals from Eastern Europe, and later with the Soros Foundation set up in 1984 in Budapest, he now has 12 foundations in the countries of Eastern Europe, including former member states of the Soviet Union. He is the author of* The Alchemy of Finance *and* Opening the Soviet System.

Zoltán Farkas *is a journalist on the staff of Hungarian Radio.*

The Soros Foundation

The Soros Foundation has been active in Hungary since May 1984. Up to 1990 it was known as the Hungarian Academy of Sciences—Soros Foundation Committee; since 1991 it has been an independent organization under its present name. It has to date made available some $40 million, directly or indirectly, in the form of money grants, scholarships and for the purchase of equipment.

Initially, György Soros promised at least a million dollars a year: this, however, in time rose to an annual three to five million dollars. Some equipment was made available free of charge, some for its equivalent cost in forints—a considerable help since those were lean years indeed as regards hard currency. The forints thus obtained by the Foundation were used to finance other programmes.

Several hundred scholarships were made available at universities in Europe and overseas. In addition, close to a million dollars has been spent on trips abroad by secondary school pupils. The Foundation has made it possible for around 2,200 young scientists and scholars to attend conferences or otherwise spend time abroad in pursuit of their studies or research. Grants have been made to around 350 writers, poets and critics, as well as approximately five hundred social scientists in financing projects within Hungary.

Around a hundred music ensembles and dramatic societies, some of them amateur, have been awarded grants or financial help towards buying equipment.

Support for various kinds of autonomous associations, local history associations, adult education and specialized university colleges has always been given high priority. Around 200 organizations have received grants amounting to 80 million forints as well as computers, faxes, and other modern office equipment.

Over several years more than seven hundred copiers were imported by the Foundation and made available to organizations such as those listed above as well as to libraries, archives, schools, and scientific institutions.

The Soros Foundation has furthered the introduction of modern health care equipment and methods. Roughly three million dollars have been spent on this purpose, but the actual support has been much greater than that, since the collaboration of other institutions and foundations is sought on particular projects.

The Foundation also supports around fifty cultural and political periodicals, as well as the publication of Hungarian and foreign works in the social sciences.

The Foundation has furthermore given assistance in the introduction of educational methods, such as those of Rogers, Montessori or Steiner.

Soros Foundations, bearing a variety of names, have also been founded in other of the former socialist countries. One of the present key activities of the Foundation is to provide a framework within which all the supporters of an open society in the region may cooperate. This same aim is served by the Central European University. György Soros has made $5 million available to it, additional to the sums mentioned above.

Foundations in Hungary

The years 1990 and 1991 were a period when foundations once again became active in Hungary. Although nobody has full data for the number of foundations, the estimate is between eight and ten thousand at the middle of 1992.

Behind this number lies an extremely rapid development, since their regulation found its way back to the statute book as late as in 1987. (Before this, only something called "assumption of obligations for purposes of public interest"—a sort of foundation-substitute—figured in Hungarian legislation.) However, even the 1987 legislation did not make it possible for foundations to develop rapidly in number or in property, since their formation was still subject to preliminary approval by the administration (whether a ministry or a local council). Since this limited the rights of the founders and made the formation of a foundation subject to state control, another amendment to the relevant statute was necessary. Since the beginning of 1990, only registration has been required of a foundation.

Presently, both individuals and corporate entities can create a foundation, which must possess enough property to be able to realize its aims, which are of public interest. (The minimal sum, however, was not stipulated.) Some foundations are open, that is, anybody can join them, others are closed, where only the income earned by the funds can be used for foundation purposes. Since minimal property was not stipulated, and since a tax-rebate on contributions to foundations was introduced (amounting to 117 million forints in 1989 and 454 million forints in 1990 for individuals only), foundations began to appear rapidly. However, it became clear that more and more commercial enterprises were camouflaging themselves as foundations.

Hence control by the courts became more rigorous, in an attempt to prevent the registration of pseudo-foundations, whose purpose was to allow a few people to make a lot of money. (The old regulation entitled every registered

Do you mean the successor states of the Soviet Union or does this apply to the whole of Central and Eastern Europe?

I am talking about the whole region. However, Central Europe does have chances to close the gap with Europe and an open society. This, of course, depends on whether Europe itself is willing to make the sacrifices necessary to pull up this region. I hope that Central Europe will succeed. Indeed, I have not given up all hopes as yet in connection with the former Soviet Union, but their chances of closing the gap with Europe are slim.

In your view time and money are needed to close the gap. I feel we do not have enough time, since the integration of Western Europe has accelerated and we cannot just stand and wait to see the outcome and wonder if we want to join this integration. There is a danger of the gap becoming permanent and of our being left on the outside. Bulgaria, Rumania, or the successor states of Yugoslavia may well be irritated by the three Central European countries signing an association agreement with the European Community which entails full membership in the long run. They possibly feel that this excludes them.

I do not agree. Time does not press Central Europe as much as it does the former

foundation to give an acknowledgement to contributors for tax relief purposes.) There was also debate about what can be considered as a purpose of public interest—for example, if somebody supports a school that his child happens to attend (and thus practically puts the money back into the family), isn't this a case of a private school in disguise rather than a foundation? The current solution is that it is up to the courts to register the foundation, but only those sponsors who receive an acknowledgement from the tax authorities are entitled to tax relief. In other words, state control is back—at least for tax relief. This regulation will probably slow down the growth in the number of foundations as well as that of their funds; according to many, it would have been much better to compel the foundations to go public, to compel them to write annual reports or to inform their sponsors about their activity through the media.

It is typical of Hungarian foundations that in many cases they are actually "state foundations", that is, former state—or trade union or communist party—property has been placed under "social" supervision or control, by being assigned to an "impartial" board of trustees. The former trade union holiday homes became the National Holiday Foundation, the income from privatization of former local party newspapers went to the Attila József Foundation, even the idea of public service television and radio, functioning as a public endowment, was raised.

The public is mainly familiar with these state foundations (besides the foundations for "private purposes" and a few large private foundations). However, after the still current state domination of society and the economy comes to an end, and as a consequence of more and more rigorous tax regulations, a natural equilibrium will finally set in after this initial boom. Foundations will be formed, financed by genuine private property and for genuinely public purposes, and these foundations will be an important step towards the desired liberalization of Hungary.

Gábor Juhász

Soviet Union. Revolutionary changes reached their peak in 1989 here and since then things have cooled down. Time favours democracy, pluralism and a market economy: with the passing of time, these can take off. The seeds already exist in Central Europe.

Is everyone as confident as you?

From the economic point of view, this region is developing and investments will yield results in time. Although privatization is proceeding slowly and sluggishly, many private firms are being founded. This is particularly true of Hungary, but Poland's position is not that bad either. The newly-founded private firms will gradually become stronger. However, politically speaking, the situation is not so reassuring. The democratic anti-communist opposition started with a certain political capital. This capital derived from their opposition to the regime. They gained from the revolutions. They got most of the votes in the elections. Solidarnost obtained practically one hundred per cent. In Hungary, there were two major oppositional groups, the Association of Free Democrats and the Hungarian Democratic Forum. The leaders of the Forum were equally anti-communist, though their motivation was different. These two parties together, with the Association of Young Democrats, obtained

about seventy per cent of the votes. The Smallholders' Party and the Christian Democrats joined them. These last two surfaced from somewhere in the past, they had no role whatsoever in the struggle against communism. They were, so to say, nostalgia parties. That core which drew its capital from the change of régime and from the struggle against communism, the core which obtained seventy per cent of the votes, is now crumbling away. In Poland, the old opposition recently fell apart, in Hungary, this had already happened before the elections. However, since the elections the support for both the Forum and the Free Democrats has crumbled. The danger is that if there is no economic improvement in the future and the democratic parties fall apart, then these countries might also drift in a politically dangerous direction.

What would you take this dangerous direction to be?

An antidemocratic, demagogic, crude dictatorship. Just consider that in the presidential elections in Poland, Tyminski came second. This warns us that there is a potential danger, given that the erosion of political authority continues. For that matter, similar trends have emerged in Hungary as well. The situation is again different in Czecho-Slovakia—Slovakia appears prone to such developments. In other words, economic development could find itself running counter to political trends: economic progress would carry these countries forward, and at the same time, political progress might grind to a halt. I cannot say that I am over-optimistic, since there is a sensitive balance between political and economic development and it is not yet clear what will come out of the whole thing.

In Hungary, too, the possible danger of an authoritarian regime is being debated. And we have not mentioned other countries of the region where it is even more likely that such a system might develop. These countries appear to be fatally drifting in that direction.

This is an exaggeration. Every democracy needs a powerful executive. Government must be efficient, especially when a quick transformation has to be carried out. And you shouldn't forget that presidential systems exist, the president of the United States, for instance, has enormous executive power, much greater than the presidents in Western Europe have. Walesa might flirt with dictatorship, but he is basically a democrat in my opinion. I think he uses these steps and proposals only as a threat. In this respect, he is like Yeltsin, who is also a strong personality. But let us suppose that a dictatorship will emerge in Russia—it is much more likely there than in Poland—it will not be introduced by Yeltsin. Yeltsin is committed to democracy. He and Walesa remind me of De Gaulle, it was proposed to him that he be a dictator, but he refused.

You said that the societies of Eastern Europe need time and money. What is at stake here?

The future of this region is at stake: these countries will either join Europe or they will become local nationalist dictatorships. Nationalist dictatorships always need an enemy to be able to survive. Thus, they need confrontation, struggles—they need wars.

Of enemies we have enough, we don't have to go out looking for them. This region is replete with real and artificially stirred ethnic conflicts. The value of per capita GDP in these countries is somewhere around two or three thousand dollars, one-fifth or sixth of the Western European figures—if we exclude the richest states. Thus, there are things enough to struggle for: higher levels of income, power, ethnic rights.

Mainly the latter. On the other hand, you are right that all this is related to the economic situation. When the economy is falling apart, the only way a regime can maintain itself is by stirring ethnic conflict. It is impossible to foresee what the future will bring— prosperity or conflicts.

It is clear that the West is being cautious. A few years ago, many people in Hungary hoped that the West would cancel all or part of our debt, that they would transfer their best technology and invest. But even the reduction of debts did not come to pass. Many economists hoped that at least the interest on the debts would be invested in the country, that at least part of the debt would be converted into bonds or shares. But even this did not happen.

All these were vain hopes. Although I think that at the time of the first democratic elections, it would have been possible to draw a line between the past and the future. It might have been possible to arrange that the debts of the past and the debts of the future be handled differently. This would have required a firm decision. I proposed this myself—but it did not happen.

The international financial institutions—the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—made it clear that this would cost a great deal. Hungary is present in the international money market, indeed, last year, the country was named as the bond issuer of the year by the leading British review Euromoney, *so we will gain more if we pay on time and obtain new credits, than if we repudiate the debts of the past.*

I do not agree with this line of reasoning. Nobody could expect these international monetary institutions to work against the interests of the large banks. We could not expect them to offer a reduction of debts. It was up to Hungary to raise the issue—and then, they would have accepted. It would have required cleverness to arrange. After the elections, it was possible to break with the past, to be detached from it, leading financiers confirmed this. They would have regarded it as a manifestation of the revolutionary process.

In spite of the fact that the changes in Hungary were continuous and happened peacefully? We must bear in mind that the government of Miklós Németh had an agreement with the International Monetary Fund that was in force for several years. Would they have accepted the government repudiating the financial commitments of the past?

I think so. If the difference between the governments of Miklós Németh and that of József Antall had been more clear cut, then we could have counted on it. But in order for that to happen, the difference between the reform-communist government of Miklós Németh and the democratic government of József Antall would have to have been accentuated, and then the change would not have been that smooth. A hitch or two should have been made to occur. But such thinking was alien to József Antall. He is a coalition leader, a flexible politician, ready to make compromises. He is not a revolutionary, but the leader of a peacetime government.

As opposed to Walesa and Yeltsin.

Yes, he is clearly a very different figure. For him, such a solution was inacceptable. Thus, the country inherited the burdens of the past and hopes of a reduction of debts vanished. Now, the only opportunity to obtain a reduction—since we have missed this historic occasion—is for the country to go bankrupt. Fortunately, this will not happen. Hungary's position is quite good, it will be able to pay off its debts—but the price is too high. The debts of the past are overwhelming. That's why there is inflation, that's why the standard of living is going down, that's why there

is not enough money for investment. The trouble is that all this has become a source of political tension.

The Central European states are afraid that the former Soviet empire will syphon off the little money that was intended for us initially, since in world politics what is happening in Russia, the Ukraine or Kazakstan is much more important. In Hungary we debate whether the government of József Antall functions democratically enough, at a time when people in those countries have to live on fifty dollars a month.

I'd like to emphasize that we must make a distinction between aid and investment. As for aid—you are right. The situation on the territory of the former Soviet Union is more important to the world. Much more important than the situation here. But capital goes where it can function well. It functions quite well in Hungary, half of the private capital investment that flowed into the region went to Hungary. This is very promising. Within the region the foundations of an open society have been laid in Poland, Czecho-Slovakia and Hungary—perhaps even in Bulgaria. Certain traditions are present, and the right attitude. On the other hand, we cannot say this about the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. In both countries civil war is endemic. Consequently, I see the chances of closing the gap with Europe moderately optimistically as regards the countries in the first group, and pessimistically as regards those in the latter.

We are clearly aware in Eastern Europe that America may never be able to understand us. Do you think that people on the North American continent are able to keep up with what is going on in this region? Do they sense the differences between countries, do they sense that two kinds of countries exist here? If the papers say that a United Nations airplane was shot down in the air-space of Yugoslavia or that the president is ousted in Georgia, won't these items of news discourage businessmen from venturing their capital? Won't they say that this region should first finish with its conflicts—quickly, if possible—and then, when the fighting is over, the borders are re-drawn, the system of democratic institutions is consolidated and people have something to eat, then we can talk about cooperation and business?

Unfortunately this is true. They do not understand what is going on and because they don't understand and because, in fact, there is confusion, they want to stay out of it. I think this is a tragedy, because this region will fall behind without outside help. This is something I have known for a long time, which is why I set up my foundations in these countries.

Aren't you afraid of becoming a second Armand Hammer? He met Lenin, he did business with him, he may even have become rich thanks to such deals, but American businessmen did not want to follow his example. Don't you think that the same thing will happen in your case, that in the near future they will not follow you to this part of Europe?

I don't think so. I do not bring capital here, I am only in charge of foundations. I don't know if you see the difference. I don't do business with Eastern Europe, so my situation is absolutely different from that of a Hammer or even a Maxwell. But it's true that even this is beyond the comprehension of many people, since they are unable to follow what is going on here. But my situation is easy to explain. I am a kind of Don Quixote, fighting windmills; in other words, the balance of power is such that my efforts cannot really change the course of events. But even if my endeavours prove to be unsuccessful, I will feel that I have at least tried.

One thing that you can claim is that wherever your foundations set foot, the communist systems disappeared.

It's the other way round, I appeared where the system was about to collapse.

But now you have to do something different. The idea that this region needs substantial help must be accepted somehow. It seems to be more difficult to make them believe this than to wait for the systems to collapse.

This is true, unfortunately. I am trying hard to show an example, but as far as I can see, nobody is following me.

Perhaps capital would flow more quickly into these countries if there were a vigorous private economy, but there isn't. Privatization, which was supposed to establish private property, has slowed down. Privatization has taken various forms. In Czecho-Slovakia, for instance, they experimented with distributing some of the property owned by the state in the form of vouchers. In Poland, they tried the same method combined with privatization administered by the state. In Hungary, it is mainly the government that privatizes, through the State Property Agency. There are all kinds of methods, yet things are moving slowly everywhere. What do you think could be done?

The first research programme at the Central European University concerns privatization. Economists are studying what is going on in these countries. Bit by bit, the slogan that even privatization must be privatized is getting to be accepted. The state cannot carry out privatization, it is inadequate in itself, specialist firms and their staff must be hired.

Economics or, at least Hungarian economics, seems to have been confronted with the question quite suddenly. Unfortunately, it doesn't mean that things are going very well here at the moment.

Yes, it is a characteristic of revolutions that events occur too quickly for people to prepare for them. These dilemmas caught the experts unprepared, and they set out in the wrong direction. But let me add that I know from my own experience how hard it is even to establish a foundation. It takes a whole year. It is difficult to set up the institutions and to shape the way they are going to function. If we take this into consideration, then it is a remarkable fact that, for example in Poland, the privatization of some large state firms was accomplished in a year. The whole process is fastest in Germany, since they have the most money for this purpose. The unemployment rate is high, the economy has collapsed, still, we can observe some signs of growth. A quick and radical transformation is taking place. This is undoubtedly an expensive, but at least a safe, solution. There is at least somebody there to carry the costs. No doubt, the East German economy will be completely absorbed by the German and European market economy. In other countries, there is nobody to sponsor the transformation.

Hungary, for instance, hoped for German aid in the first place. At the time of President Bush's visit here in 1989, we could still hope for American help as well. Since then, the most we expect is aid from within Europe.

Still, the switch-over to a market economy is going on here as well, even if slowly. The Hungarian economy has proved that it can switch from the Soviet market to the Western market, it has proven to be quite flexible.

Even if we can argue about the economic advantages and disadvantages of the change, it is clear that cultural life has suffered severe losses. Many fewer books are published, literature is about to be ousted from our life. Must we consider the school system, the higher education system and all the arts as losers? What will be the consequence?

This is precisely what depresses me. Although, even from this point of view, the

situation is Hungary is relatively the best. I think it is fantastic that the magazine *2000* is printed in six to eight thousand copies. The literary monthly *Holmi* is another successful new publication. Our foundation has undoubtedly done something in this respect. But the decline in cultural standards and the moral decline are depressing. I am trying not to lose hope, trusting that we will touch bottom one day and then improvement will be inevitable. Most probably, the moral decline that we are experiencing right now is a consequence of the decay of the old system. It is in fact also related to privatization, which offers a great opportunity for dirty tricks. Stealing state property has become common practice. Two ideas clash here: if privatization is too quick, if wildcat privatization takes place, then thieving becomes common. If the state has strict control over the process, then it will slow the process down. This is further complicated by the fact that the appropriate legislation takes time. However, this situation will be settled sooner or later, a new legality will be established, abuses will cease—there will be no opportunity for them. But there is a danger that those who will work their way into the structure, those who will hold power, will be precisely those who embezzled state property. Consequently, the newly-formed system will not be as beautiful as we had once imagined it.

According to Norman MacRea, writing in The Economist, *only defence and the budget will remain in the state sphere by the year 2022, the whole economy and social life will be privatized. He also adds that Americans will not be confined to chosing between a Democratic and a Republican candidate; a group of technocrats will appear, and they will promise not to levy more than ten per cent tax and to govern more efficiently. Do you also put your faith in a private economy, the market and autonomy to such an extent?*

Certainly not. That would be another excess, like communism, but in the other direction. The lesson we should learn from the collapse of communism is not that everything must be privatized, because then the individual will organize society according to his own interests. What we should realize is that a private economy, a market economy is a complex system which must be built and maintained; and self-interest is not enough for that. One must believe in this system. Belief is needed, so that people would want to live in such a system and would be willing even to make sacrifices that run against their self-interest. If they are not willing, then this system will also collapse. Thus, faith is required—faith in a free society. If that is absent, then there will be no free society. This is what in my view recent events have proved. If people do not accept this, then free societies may collapse just as the communist systems did. Therefore, free societies are also in great danger nowadays. The insecurity resulting from the collapse of communism threatens the stability of free societies. There is a danger that this international free society—that has been developing so beautifully since the Second World War—will disintegrate. Just as communism has collapsed.

Can this really happen? Don't mutual dependence and integration exclude this possibility?

No. The collapse of communism is not a triumph of free society, on the contrary, it is a major test for a free society. We must learn that a free society is not built merely on self-interest, but on people's faith in a free society. If this is accepted, then a free society will survive this crisis. If not, it will collapse.

Zoltán Farkas

John Lukacs

A Great Conservative

Ignác Romsics: *Bethlen István. Politikai életrajz*
(István Bethlen. A political biography).
Magvető, Budapest, 1991. 356 pp.

Count István Bethlen may well have been one of the greatest Hungarian statesmen in the twentieth century. He was surely one of the greatest of Hungary's Prime Ministers. The society and the world in which he lived, and which he in many ways represented, is now at an irrecoverable distance from us. Yet many of the values and standards that he defended, espoused, and attempted to promote, do not only deserve attention; they remain enduring. His Prime Ministership amounted to ten years of a political and public career that lasted for more than four decades. He was, by and large, not unsuccessful during those ten years. Yet many of the most striking evidences of his statesmanlike vision would accumulate after his retirement from the visible political arena. That vision could not be translated into political reality. Despite his warnings, dark tragedies befell his country during the last years of his life—a life that ended in obscurity and tragedy.

Bethlen's father and mother (neé Teleki) descended from two of the most ancient and prominent Transylvanian noble families. His education (including the formative period of his years in the Vienna Theresianum) corresponded with that of other young men of the old Habsburg Empire's high nobility. Evidence of his intellectual ability appeared early in his life. In 1901 he became a Member of Parliament. (He was married in the same year). His principal interests were directed to problems of his native Transylvania and to agriculture. His political convictions were conservative and patriotic, with a strong inclination of respect for the achievements of nineteenth-century liberalism. He opposed—through most of his life—universal secret suffrage as well as a radical redistribution of land, because of his conviction that such democratic reforms were, as yet, unapplicable to Hungary. At the same time, he was a constant upholder and defender of personal and civil rights. He had a considerable respect for England and for English institutions, and—what was somewhat unusual at the time—he learned to speak and read English early.[1]

In 1919 Bethlen, active—temporarily—in Vienna, was a leading figure among the adversaries of the then communist

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government in Budapest. His deeply beloved Transylvania was now lost to Rumania. After his return to Budapest, his self-confidence and his conservative intelligence would contribute to his reputation and career. He was not entirely in accord with the more simplistic and rigid views of the Regent, Admiral Horthy, whose reliance on Bethlen's political philosophy would mature only in later years. Still in 1921 Bethlen became Prime Minister of the government of a torn, defeated, and impoverished country. His achievements during the ten years of his Premiership were remarkable, especially in retrospect. They were years of consolidation, of the weakening of extremism, of a financial and cultural recovery that is as striking in retrospect as it was unforeseeable in the beginning. Such a retrospect must take into account the large number of the political and personal enemies of this reserved, and often remote, aristocrat of a politician, whose self-confidence would often be mistaken for arrogance at its worst and pride at its best. In sum, he was more respected than popular; but then, he was a statesman rather than a charismatic national leader.

In 1931 he resigned. Thereafter, as Professor Romsics puts it in one of his chapter-titles, Bethlen was "The Grand Old Man" (sic! in English) of Hungarian politics, from 1931 to 1944. Perhaps this is an exaggeration; though he was certainly that in the eyes of those who respected and esteemed him—including a number of his former opponents. It was not so in the eyes of his enemies and opponents, including many (if not most) people of the government party that Bethlen had once helped to form. The differences between its two wings, one nationalist, the other more conservative-liberal, were such that Bethlen had constant difficulties in trying to smooth them over, even during the time when he was Premier and the party's head. During the 1930s these differences became deeper and more venomous. After the death of Gyula Gömbös, the former leader of the nationalists, and Prime Minister 1932-1936, the Regent became more and more inclined to listen to Bethlen's advice. At least in Horthy's eyes, Bethlen had become something like the "Grand Old Man" of Hungarian politics.

Like almost all Hungarian political figures after the dreadful partition of Hungary in the Trianon Treaty, Bethlen was a "revisionist", meaning that the task of eventually achieving at least a partial revision of the Trianon frontiers was his primary goal for a long time—aware as he was of the nearly unsurmountable difficulties in Hungary's way. At the latest after the mid-thirties, however, this deeply conservative patriot became convinced that the main danger to Hungary now involved its very independence—because of the rising power of Hitler's Germany and because of the many admirers and followers of the Third Reich and of National Socialism within Hungary itself. Both for moral and political reasons—this duality is important—Bethlen thought that an unduly close alliance of Hungary with the Third Reich, meaning her undue dependence on the latter, was not only wrong but would lead to a national disaster since, among other dangerous consequences, the Third Reich would surely lose the coming world war. Before and during the war, Bethlen's influence on the Regent and other Hungarian personages was considerable. His views on the future of Hungary and Europe were farsighted, except perhaps for his belief that ultimately British

[1] There is a significant connection between the subject of this biography and *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, a successor of *The Hungarian Quarterly*, the idea of whose founding came from Count István Bethlen himself. He paid special attention to that excellent publication from its first issue in 1936 to 1944.

influence as well as modern democracy would prevail over the totalitarian regimes; as late as 1944 he believed that the Russian presence in Hungary, by that time inevitable, would be temporary, in which belief he was—though perhaps only in the short run—wrong. That year he had to go into clandestine hiding places from his German and Hungarian enemies who tried to hunt him down. After the Russians arrived at the country place where he was living, they treated him with unusual respect. Eventually they moved him to Russia where Bethlen—like some of Stalin's other prize guests—seems to have been kept sequestrated but in circumstances of some comfort. It seems (Romsics does not enter into this still unexplored question) that it was Hungarian communist leaders who insisted that Bethlen be not allowed to return to Hungary. In any event, he was an old and ill man by that time. The precise date of his death, and the place where he lies buried, are still unknown.

This biography is a model on many levels. Romsics's research and documentation are extraordinarily extensive (perhaps especially for the period of Bethlen's Premiership). They rest on the most varied documents and diplomatic archives in many countries, and on domestic archival, memoir, and press material. While history is, in the broad sense of the word, "revisionist," meaning that it may be revised by a potentially endless appearance of newer and newer works, I think it is highly improbable that there could be any future Bethlen biography comparable to this one. Also, I know of no biography of any Hungarian prime minister that matches this one in thoroughness. Yet I wish to refer not only to the extraordinary quantity of Romsics's research but also to the qualities of his judgment and writing. His judgments are well balanced and, at least to this reviewer, unexceptionable; and the style and tone of the writing amount to a prose that is not only highly readable but thoroughly judicious. As a matter of fact, the title of the book is unduly modest. It states "A political biography," but it is more than that. Romsics informs the reader adequately about István Bethlen's family circumstances, including his unconventional married life, his personal customs and habits, the conditions of his daily life. It cannot be otherwise: for Bethlen was a very complex human being, though one with definite personal preferences and public standards. The private Bethlen (and he was a very private man in many ways) cannot be separated from the public Bethlen: that is, the man from the statesman. We are here in the presence of something more than of a study in the political history of a man.

It speaks well of Romsics and of the evolution of Hungarian historical scholarship that this book was begun in 1979, that is, ten long years before the communist regime in Hungary would end. By that time the earlier propagandistic and ideological notion, according to which Bethlen was but another representative of "reaction" or "Fascism", had been overtaken by the notion accepted among historians that Bethlen was a "conservative." But, then, there are many kinds of "conservatives", even now, parading under that name; and how very different was Bethlen from so many of them! In his brief introduction Romsics found it necessary to mention his own political philosophical preferences, at the end of a paragraph where he also wrote—in my opinion unnecessarily—of the problems inherent in the difference between (scholarly) "objectivity" and (personal) "subjectivity." There was no need for this. *Qui s'excuse, s'accuse.* Not only Romsics's method but his value judgements are implicit and inherent in this book, almost from the first page to the last one. The quality of his work is such that it obviates any need of its author to explain himself. "Wondrous indeed is a great book," Carlyle wrote. This book—as its subject—has the marks of greatness.

Mihály Vajda

An Exceptional Traveller in Eastern Europe

Timothy Garton Ash: *A balsors édes hasznai* (The Uses of Adversity). Selected by János Kenedi. Európa—Századvég, Budapest 1991. 308 pp.

Timothy Garton Ash has managed to penetrate the tragic world of Eastern Europe to an incredible depth, but at the same time he never loses sight of the fact that treasures which have their origin in the uses of adversity, the farmyard warmth of oppression, isolation, limited scope for action, etc., are disappearing from these societies at a rapid and increasing rate, while liberty inevitably has a long and painful period of gestation. There is no doubt that he would be pleased if at least some of the things of value which developed under the difficult conditions of communism were to survive. Garton Ash writes in the preface to the Hungarian edition that, "Among the numerous serious questions concerning the future of the region and the role of the individual in it the most important to me is the one discussed at the end of this book." The question is the following: "Travelling through this region over the last decade, I have found treasures: examples of great moral courage and intellectual integrity, comradeship, deep friendship, family life, time and space for serious conversation, music, literature, not disturbed by the perpetual noise of our media-driven and obsessively telecommunicative world, Christian witness in its original and purest form, more broadly, qualities of relations between men and women of very different backgrounds, and once bitterly opposed faiths—an ethos of solidarity. Here the danger of sentimental idealization is acute, for the privileged visitor enjoys these benefits without paying the costs. There is no doubt that, on any quantitative or utilitarian reckoning, the costs have been far higher than the benefits. Yet it would be even more wrong to pretend that these treasures were not real. They were. And for me the question of questions after 1989 is: What if any of these good things will survive liberation? Was the community only a community of fate, a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*? Were these *just* the uses of adversity?"

It is not up to the critic to question what is most important to the author. In the Hungarian Preface he goes on to ask: Will any of these good things survive the liberation? Or were these just the uses of adversity? These questions and all the essays collected in the book, would seem to indicate that Garton Ash is highly sceptical regarding their chances of survival. He knew at the time of writing that things emotionally important to him

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would not prosper, and events after 1989 have proved him right. His disappointment, however, does not make him forget either the disproportionately high price which had to be paid for all that or, one of the key ideas of articles already published at the time of the communist state, that those times were not morally sound. His belief that 1989 was the year of truth remains unshaken despite the injustice and suffering which will inevitably be the lot of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe in the immediate future.

In the absence of nostalgia for the sweet uses of adversity, Timothy Garton Ash would not be what he is, that—what shall I call him?—historian, writer, journalist who, because he understood almost everything, was able to do more than anyone else to ensure that Western public opinion understood at least something of postwar Central and Eastern Europe, giving them not empty abstractions purporting to describe the nature of the system but a palpable picture of everyday life that—despite the uniformity of the Soviet empire—differed from country to country. In the absence of this nostalgia, the intellectuals of Central and Eastern Europe could not have learnt as much as we did from Garton Ash about ourselves and this world. He knows it as if he were part of it, yet nevertheless his eyes are those of a traveller from distant lands. Garton Ash is a traveller critical of his home base as well, aware of all the injustices and deficiencies of his own country, but he is aware that for all its shortcomings, his appears as the best of all possible worlds for those of us who live in Central and Eastern Europe. That is Timothy Garton Ash's secret. The romantic who has no reservations about the above mentioned good things, who longs for a world that never existed, and which will never be, and a prosaic realist peacefully coexist inside him. The prosaic realist knows that it is much better—morally better too—if a morally sound period (where the moral alternatives are absolutely clear, and a few—though living in the thick of filth and disgust—are able to realize the highest moral values free of any ambiguity) is replaced by a well-functioning world, where few shrink from compromises (even moral ones) but they are able to act in that manner in the awareness of not having offended anyone by committing unforgivable crimes. Garton Ash agrees with Brecht's Galileo who answered Andrea Sarti's despairing "Unhappy the land that has no heroes!" quietly: "No. Unhappy the land that needs heroes." *

Not that post-Stalinist communism was a morally sound period in Thomas Mann's sense of the term.

The articles included were published between 1981 and 1990 and are chronologically arranged according to the date of their being written. The time and place are Central and Eastern Europe between Pope John Paul's second visit to Poland and the reunification of Germany. This is not a chronicle of events, those are remembered, or forgotten, anyway. What is truly exciting is to relive what went on in all of us, all the way from the "take it or leave it, that's all you'll get" state of mind in which we were all submerged, whatever way we may have reacted, to the shock of recognition: "This was the year communism in Eastern Europe died. 1949-1989 R.I.P. And the epitaph might be: Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it."

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*Garton Ash's surprisingly clever and understanding piece on Brecht (fortunately included by Kenedi, though apparently outside the scope of this volume) could not have been written if accepting what is contradictory were not part of his nature as a writer. It was only thus that Garton Ash could understand that Brecht, this monster capable of the dirtiest political trick in the book ("The monster has talent, said Thomas Mann sadly," Garton Ash writes) was a great poet declared to be their very own by Solidarnosc in 1980).

There is much enjoyment in "Sketches from another Germany", in which, in a few pages, something emerges all the way from daily life to politics and politics to literature which is an apprehensible image of the GDR that was; so too is there in the clever analysis of the present prospects of Poland, Czecho-Slovakia and Hungary—countries of a Central European character—("Eastern Europe...", or in his meditations on the options open to a reunited Germany ("Germany Unbound."). It is impossible to mention here all that is important in Garton Ash's essays, nor is that my present purpose.

Timothy Garton Ash writes in his Preface: "This book reflects my own interest in ideas rather than armies, cultures rather than economies, nations rather than political systems and, above all, individual men and women rather than amorphous collectivities." The last confrontation is the important one here, trying to interpret it offers a clue to what Garton Ash's analysis is really about.*

What makes people act as they do is at the centre of his interest. His book thus becomes the chronicle of the process which moved man in Eastern Central Europe from impotently satisfying the requirements of the system (perhaps even active identification with the system) to a rejection of these requirements, even if—understandably—the overwhelming majority was never active in opposition. Naturally we will not understand why communism expired—relatively peacefully, for that matter—in Eastern and Central Europe without a grasp of the economic, military and political difficulties which Garton Ash is less interested in. But what implacably pointed to the end, to the passing away, was undoubtedly the ongoing change in attitudes and behaviour. This is so although, naturally, the accumulating problems of the above mentioned institutions also played their part. It is, indeed, clear that these problems generally became more acute just because of the change in attitudes, which is why Garton Ash can place his finger on the beginning of the end. After all, the economy never really worked under communism, the burdens of the arms race were too heavy for the Warsaw Pact right from the start, etc. etc. The majority, however, cooperated, those who had never been communists as well as the disillusioned. Garton Ash rightly points out that a totalitarian system, a system based on *totale Mobilmachung* is on the way to dissolution once it shows itself incapable of moving the minds and souls of its citizens. This was certainly true of East Germany in the seventies.

"The People's Economic Plan for the Borough of Prenzlauer Berg is an example, in miniature, of the central planning by numbers that was introduced in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s: 'Bookholdings in the libraries are to be increased from 350,000 to 450,000 volumes.The number of borrowings is to be increased to 108.2 per cent.' Not 'People should be encouraged to borrow more books from the public libraries,' but 'The number of borrowings is to be increased to 108.2 per cent.' I pictured the borough librarian at the end of the year, having achieved only 105 per cent of last year's borrowings: 'Excuse me, madam, have you never read the works of Schiller? Only seventy volumes—let me sign them out in your name.'

"The Plan concludes with the socialist competition: BEAUTIFY OUR CAPITAL BERLIN. *MACH MIT* (JOIN IN). I witnessed *'MACH MIT'* in practice when a poster went up in the hall of our apartment house announcing a *'MACH MIT'*

* Garton Ash is of course also interested in understanding and describing the personalities he met. But this is perhaps less important than his interest in what motivates the man in the street.

action to clear out the winter's rubbish on the following Saturday morning at eleven o'clock. I reported punctually for work. A quarter of an hour passed. Half an hour. Children peered curiously through the broken window-pane of the house door. Nobody, but nobody, *machte mit*. The winter's slush, old cigarette ends, chewing-gum papers remained just where they were.

Here in Prenzlauer Berg I saw what one gifted observer has called 'the counter-revolution of reality'. East Germany clearly is a totalitarian state in the sense that it *aspires* to occupy and direct its citizens' every waking moment. The very idea of free time is suspect to all would-be totalitarian regimes. 'In socialism the contradiction between work and free time, typical of capitalism, is removed,' the official Small Political Dictionary explains. Moreover, 'free time must be purposefully and effectively deployed by all members of the socialist community.' Great energy is devoted to this mobilization of the population. Schoolchildren are 'won' for 'activity... in the productive sections.' Youths are 'persuaded' to participate in Defence Sport events. Millions turn out for the May Day parade. To this extent the regime does succeed in mobilizing the bodies of its citizens. But even East Germany is rarely able to mobilize their hearts and minds—as it undoubtedly did in the early years of reconstruction, after the misery of wartime destruction."

But that was not the beginning of the end yet. The point in time after which the authorities, at least in one country, could no longer reckon with even the reluctant cooperation of the majority, was June 1979, the Pope's first visit to Poland. That was the moment when the penny dropped in Poland: it was no longer necessary to lead a double life. There was no need to and if you objected to the system it was wrong to use the apparently innocent marks of conformism, no need to speak differently in public and in private. Before, even when nobody any longer believed in the lies of the system, not even the masters, as Václav Havel put it. Lies were no longer effective agents but they hindered the articulation of shared wishes and obvious truths. Everyone had accepted the totalitarian system as unalterable and thus helped to operate it. The 1979 papal visit to Poland put an end to all that. A growing number—successfully—tried to live in Truth. It was a long process but the time came when even the masters tried to use a human language. And that was the end: These regimes lived by the Word, and they perished by the Word.

One might retort that in the absence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself the nations of Eastern and Central Europe would never have been liberated. Could be. But didn't Poland in '80 and '81 decisively contribute to all that happened in the Soviet Union since?

And Hungary? Was the ever accelerating drama of 1989 not started off by the Hungarian leadership throwing in the towel? But how is that related to Poland, or to TRUTH? But please remember that Hungarian goulash communism based on the possessors of power—trembling in fear of a new revolution—deliberately gave up the idea of a *totale Mobilmachung* as early as the middle sixties. Their youngest generation was already able to communicate in a human language. The system passed away because the "counter-revolution" metamorphosed into a "popular rising".

The system passed away. Perhaps not quietly but just about without any bloodletting. It is possible that there were optimists ten years ago who could imagine living to see the end, but even they did not imagine it to be as peaceful. Not even Timothy Garton Ash. In September 1988 he still wrote: "...But if they hold on to it they will also try and defend it with every means at their disposal." It did not happen that way. Other than in Rumania the communists hardly moved a finger in

the defence of their power. * Indeed, in Hungary, they acted as the liquidators of the régime, in Poland they were most anxious to ensure that the handing over of power be peaceful, and even the GDR and Czecho-Slovak leadership—which did stubbornly hang on to power (although despondent to a man, with the possible exception of Honecker himself)—did not dare to have recourse to extreme measures.** Why not? Garton Ash mentions three factors: the Gorbachev, the Helsinki and the Tocqueville factors. Since Gorbachev made it clear to the communists of Eastern and Central Europe that he was not in a position to defend them against their peoples (where the leaders, though they understood the message, turned off their "receivers", not knowing how to react [Germans and Czecho-Slovaks] Gorbachev tactfully but demonstrably addressed the people itself, and they got the message all right) they judged the fight to be hopeless. That's where, according to Garton Ash, the Helsinki factor comes in. "Nonetheless, the factor 'Gorbachev' alone does not suffice to explain why these ruling élites did not more vigorously deploy their own, still formidable police and security forces in a last-ditch defence of their own power and privilege. Is it too fanciful to suggest that the constant, persistent harping of the West on certain international norms of domestic conduct, the East European leaders' yearning for international respectability, and the sensed linkage between this and the hard currency credits they so badly needed, in short, the factor 'Helsinki' played at least some part in staying the hands of those who might otherwise have given the order to shoot?"

Nevertheless, Garton Ash identifies the Tocqueville factor as decisive: that the power élite lost its faith in the legitimacy of its rule.

I should argue that Garton Ash there somewhat confuses the picture. The Gorbachev factor, naturally, stands. I don't believe, however, that, after the reception of the Gorbachev-message, communists in Eastern Central Europe still bothered about Helsinki, or gave much thought to the legitimacy or justification of their power. Certainly not. Excepting perhaps the sclerotic Honecker—who, however, would have had his bloodbath if his colleagues had let him—they simply accepted that the game was lost. Everyone, in keeping with his position, endeavoured to take his leave making the maximum possible profit (or else to carry on). The younger generation of Hungarian communists at one fell swoop rid themselves of those (Kádár et al.) of whom they rightly supposed that they—blinkered against reality—would insist on the given forms of their power (and thus

*Bloody events connected with the falling apart of the Soviet Union and, more recently, Yugoslavia, must not be forgotten, but things are more complicated there. It is not merely dominant groups but the dominant groups of dominant nations which defend their own positions. The Gorbachev-Yeltsin rivalry—which is also something of an ensemble scene—does not contradict this either. Neither, not even Gorbachev, defends purely communist power interests, but Russian interests as well. At the time of writing it is by no means clear who does the latter more successfully or more rationally.

** Timothy Garton Ash does not deal with Bulgaria, Rumania and Albania. In those countries the communists for some time preserved power, lending it democratic legitimation not owing to their own stubborn insistence, but owing to the impotence of the population (chiefly of village folk).

*** As far as I am concerned it was at the time of Gorbachev's visit to Prague that it became obvious to me that we would soon be free.

also endanger the younger generation) and promptly and cleverly, liquidated the system. The most cunning ensured themselves a place in politics or in the economy.The Hungarian communists did not insist on communist power because they did insist on their own which—what is more—they no longer had to legitimize by lies. I am sure something similar happened in Poland, but things there are not clear to me. German, Czech and Slovak communists recognized that communist power had had its day, just as the Hungarians and Poles did, but the option of giving up communist power and maintain their own was not open to them. I do not think there is any need to waste words on explaining why not. They therefore tried to hang on to communist power for as long as possible, but did not dare to have recourse to extreme measures. They did this not because of Helsinki, nor because they lost their faith in the legitimacy of their power (if they ever entertained such a faith), they had lost it long before, but because they did not wish to end their lives *à la lanterne* or in a hangman's noose. They were well aware that no kind of terror could save them once the Hungarian and the Polish leadership had thrown in the towel. The Hungarians and the Poles (the Hungarians certainly) wanted them to recognize this. As long as Hungary and Poland alone had broken ranks nobody could be quite certain that an unexpected turn of events in the Soviet Union might not lead to intervention after all. In that event, as we well know, the communist "traitors" are shot first. That possibility had to be excluded. The most obvious method was to lend a helping hand in overthrowing the system in the other countries as well. The GDR refugees did indeed serve the purposes of the Hungarian communists.

I cannot offer documentary evidence of any of this, and I may well be wrong on a point or two. I am certain, however, that as Garton Ash argued in 1989, that people hold on to power is one of the few valid historical laws. All one ought to add is that hanging on to power at all costs does not always lead to losing one's senses. If this has become more true lately than it used to be, that ought to be chalked up to the credit of history.

As regards the present, I should only like to point to an idea or two raised by Garton Ash. He speaks from my own heart. As I mentioned, Timothy Garton Ash is a realist, for all the empathy he feels for the "sweet uses of adversity". He is well aware that the collapse of the Big Lie does not imply that we shall live in truth. These newbaked politicians, yesterday's practitioners of antipolitics, intellectuals of the opposition living in truth, would do well to remember that circumstances as it were enforce the switch from an antipolitical to an expressly political language. So much to those who wail that they are lieing to us again. But we can tell them so when they are caught in the act. That's what makes for democracy. And let me tell those who whine that their friends have changed, that they have become politicians, that's if they have. Woe to us if they have not. Like Garton Ash I prefer not to see intellectuals in positions of power. They tend to be doctrinaire and are not capable of engaging in unprincipled compromises.

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What does politics in Central Europe feed on today? What kind of parties confront each other? Garton Ash establishes that there are no class-politics, nor is there ideological confrontation (the two are not identical, it was only Marxism that wanted to make itself, and others, believe that) and then draws the conclusion that the political dividing lines of the present are based on the remnants of remembered images. The political parties (their leaderships, unfortunately, still consists of intellectuals and not of politicians) draw on history and undoubtedly, on the West for

their notions. Let me add that it will take some time yet before the politicians learn—and they will only be truly politicians when they do so—that one may well bear in mind historical paradigms or western models but one must react—and adjust to—the genuine conflicts of the present. You retort that society lacks the time to wait patiently while politicians learn their business. But even if that is true, it was nevertheless impossible to acquire the skills of democratic politics at the time of communism.

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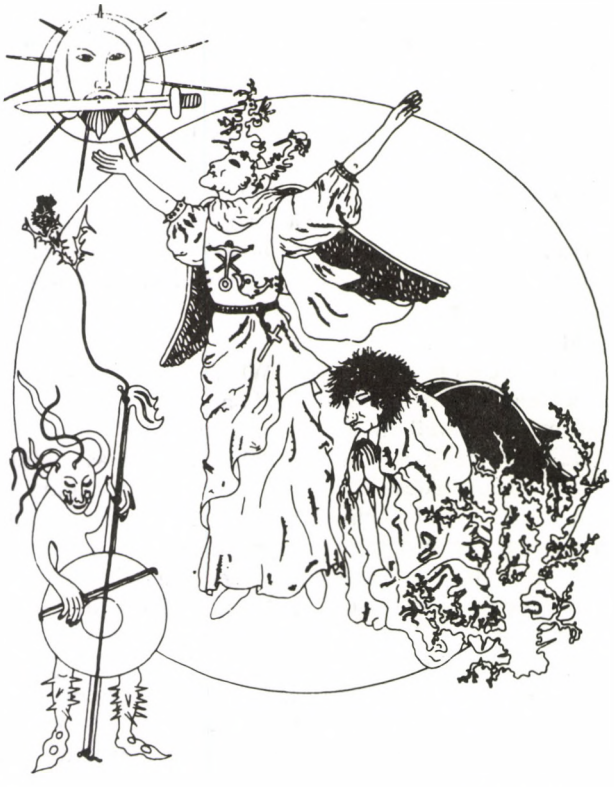
According to Garton Ash the basic political question in Central Europe today is: which variant of democratic politics can offer firm government, taking necessary measures, coping with the resultant popular unrest using parliamentary, or at least legal, instruments, thus neutralizing extra-parliamentary and antidemocratic methods. Too true. We know that is well nigh impossible. Timothy Garton Ash nevertheless feels confident that democracy in Central Europe will survive and finally stand firm, that it will not be replaced by sundry dictatorships. He adduces many reasons to back his conviction. His main argument is that authoritarian regimes were able to flourish between the two wars because of the existence of such regimes elsewhere which were associated with the wish for modernization. In contrast, he points out, there is no such example for men to look to and modernization is unambigously associated with democracy.

I am sure he is right.



Miklós Almási

The Three Deaths of the Philosopher

Árpád Kadarkay: *Georg Lukács. Life, Thought, and Politics.*
Basil Blackwell, 538 pp. £25

History has many ways of treating its old: some are simply forgotten, some are shrouded for ages in misunderstanding, and others still are escorted to their final resting place by fine books such as Árpád Kadarkay's. But this is also a sort of burial: Lukács was one of our intellectual contemporaries even for some time after his death, then faded with the changing times, ultimately, with the collapse of communism, to disappear completely. He was replaced by Lukács the subject of research, like other major modern figures in the history of philosophy—Adorno, Sartre, Bloch—whose force is no longer current, but historical, of another period. This thorough work, thus, completely buries Lukács as a living philosopher. What remains can only be dealt with through an historical and hermeneutic approach. Indeed, the two views of the man—the current and the historical—together give a complete picture of him. Hence his "third death" serves his memory well.

For clarity's sake, his first death was his "conversion" after his years as an essayist when, packing up his former self and spirit, he became a commissar, a communist functionary, a heretical and orthodox Marxist. This was his orientation until his "second" death, his actual physical death in 1971, survived by his spirit—in Neo-marxist and Post-marxist debates, during the period of Kádárist reform, until the time of the birth of the opposition movements. Then history moved on, and along came someone to deliver the final funeral oration: Kadarkay's exhaustive biography, which takes into account much unpublished material.

The book follows Lukács's life, at some points even from day to day, at others taking in whole years at a time, with light shed on the man and on the events surrounding him by writings, letters, and documents of friends and enemies. His philosophical *oeuvre* is treated within this framework: Kadarkay's great strength is that he bases his treatment of the problems of individual works on facts and on the possibilities allowed by the historical situation. Without preconceptions, he rarely passes judgment, but rather shows, though this subjects us to the main risks of hindsight, the temptation to judge the past events through the eyes of the present. Nevertheless, the author presents a critical picture of his subject through this historically objective biography.

The most interesting section, from the perspective of intellectual and human interest, is the presentation of Lukács's youth and his Heidelberg period. The author, with the help of the clarity lent by distance and copious documentation,

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portrays an intriguing and enigmatic figure. One aspect of this is the "coldness" of which his friends, lovers and colleagues alike complain. From his childhood, Lukács treated his companions, and people in general, with a distance, a coldness which befits the philosopher, and is suited to a metaphysical method, but nonetheless destructive in human and above all amorous relationships. Kadarkay explains this coldness largely, though not entirely, as a rebellion against his mother and the rather involved absence of his father. Indeed, from early childhood, Lukács was unable to bear his mother's "hypocritical" social life, the soirées arranged by the wealthy family in their villa in Buda, and the bourgeois milieu in general—the milieu which at the same time made possible his financial independence. His father, an assimilated Jewish banker of noble rank, is a more complicated story. Lukács resisted him as well, but tolerated his palpable and supportive presence. Lukács *père* supported friends of his son as well, including Béla Balázs, Bartók, and Ernst Bloch. At the same time, through his father, Lukács came to despise "bourgeois existence", which he tried to escape right from the outset. Nonetheless, his relationship with his father became more intimate, and in letters they communicate with an almost exhibitionistic openness, György Lukács treating his own persona as if it were a third person.

Then came the turbulent loves. Kadarkay has discovered, behind the mask of the scholar and metaphysician, an adventurer of love, struggling with constant depression, experimenting with himself and others. Of all his affairs, the most tormenting, and for this biography the most fruitful, was his relationship with Irma Seidler. Somewhat under the influence of Kiergegaard, Lukács shielded his creative integrity from the complications of marriage and of earthly love in general. Hence he kept Irma at a distance and sought the ideal creature rather than the earthly being, until she broke off the relationship and married a painter. Intriguingly, Lukács' physical ugliness hardly hinted at the demonic attraction of his intellect. Irma would later return to him only to be rejected: some impulse turned her to a friend from her youth, Béla Balázs, the author of the libretto to Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*. Balázs, a notorious Don Juan, accepted what she offered, but set off the next day in search of his next conquest. Irma committed suicide. A brief note from Balázs was found in her purse, cancelling their rendezvous.

It is not the bizarre aspects that primarily interest Kadarkay here. Rather, in this love triangle, in Lukács' choice of Art over Life, in his Platonic striving for the ideal, and his fear of the body, he sees the thematic background for the great work of Lukács' youth, *The Soul and the Forms*. Lukács sought the soul in a woman, not sexuality, something against which Seidler and the others rebelled.

We see this relationship not just from Lukács' perspective, but from that of all three participants, for Kadarkay has researched documents which illuminate hitherto unknown motivations, bringing into focus the psychological labyrinths of Balázs and Seidler. In contrast to Lukács's abstract world, Balázs is more "earthly", so that, as a pair, they are at opposite ends of a spectrum—although they constantly cross paths. This aspect makes the story many-layered, and suitable to aid in the understanding of *The Soul and the Forms*.

(What I liked best in the book were the hermeneutical interpretation of the essays on Kastner and Sterne, and the "farewell" catalogue on the Poor in Spirit. In these writings Kadarkay discovers the marks of an abandonment of Kantian ethics, of an overemphasis on duty in the direction of a more human ethics.)

Kadarkay has a fascinating interpretative method. Certain acts are explained by contemporary trends in American and

European culture. Hence the Seidler episode appears again in the analysis of Bartók's opera, and an interesting parallel is provided by Ibsen's last work—which sheds light on much of his *oeuvre*—*When We Dead shall Rise*. All of this helps us understand Lukács's pilgrim-like alienation from the world and from his native land. Kadarkay refers to Unamuno and Emerson for clarification, both of whom experienced a lack of response in their native countries.

Thomas Mann puts in an appearance as well. Kadarkay, using the methods of textual criticism, shows that Thomas Mann was familiar with *The Soul and the Forms* and made use of it in creating the mood of erotic resignation of *Death in Venice*; a discovery which is a real feat. The cultural and historical background is the more significant since Lukács himself attempted to interpret his own life and the world through paradigmatic examples as well, such as Kiergegaard, Ibsen, and Endre Ady.

The Soul and the Forms making Lukács famous, Kadarkay rightly places these essays in a special focus. At the same time, though, Lukács laid his philosophical groundwork with *The Theory of the Novel,* which this book cannot treat with such animation and depth. This is not surprising, since the essays may be interpreted in the way a *roman à clef* is read: each essay corresponds to a painful phase of their author's love life. All of this practically "translates" itself, hermeneutically speaking, with the aid of the reflections of members of the Max Weber, Stefan George, and Lukács circles which are at our disposal today. *The Theory of the Novel* (and even more so the *Heidelberg Aesthetics*, only touched on by Kadarkay), is much more reticent in terms of any correspondences established between the work and the author's life. This is so although his marriage with Elena Grabenkova, the *ménage à trois* with Bruno Steinbach—the mad pianist—and the Russian anarchist woman provide, as Kadarkay describes, a chart to Lukács' Dostoyevsky-mania, which Kadarkay also discusses.

The Seidler episode, together with the essayistic, philosophical farewell, form the end of the period. Ernő Seidler (the younger brother of Irma) dispelled his doubts in one evening, and the philosopher became a commissar, leaving his former identity behind him like a corpse. The book emphasises the mystery of this sudden conversion, though many things prepared the way for it. The first death...

For Kadarkay, the great riddle of the Marxist-communist period (from 1918 on) is the decline in quality. At the beginning, Lukács could still produce a great work, *History and Class Consciousness*, which, with its categories of reification and alienation, was to influence European philosophical thought for decades. But in time, his works became ever weaker. With one great exception *(The Young Hegel)*, his thinking shows a loss in depth. How is it possible that this sensitive and erudite thinker should become the author of such insubstantial works chiefly during his Moscow period? Kadarkay finds an answer in perhaps the only work of quality dating from this period, *The Young Hegel.* He sees that this book, like the earlier *The Soul and the Forms*, is a confession which offers a glimpse of what lies behind the mask. At the end of Hegel's stormy youth and revolutionary ardour, during his Frankfurt period, he arrived at a compromise with reality: only if we do not confront the world can we understand it. It is a more conservative position but also one closer to reality. As Kadarkay adds, it is like Lukács' own. After 1933, he was involved in Soviet life on an everyday level, including factional struggles, in the shadow of the trials and the everyday terror, to which he was reconciled. Or more precisely, he sees no other options

open to the armed prophet: with the approach of Fascism, Stalin becomes an historical imperative for Lukács. In for a penny...

Here too, the interpretation is precise, though one senses the lack of source material: no diaries, no intimate confessions of friends, and no letters. We cannot see the impulses behind each of his steps as we can in the period before his first "death" in 1918. The student has at his disposal only published texts, unpublished documents amongst Lukács' papers, and a few paragraphs of no particular interest from his friends and acquaintances. Under a dictatorship, one is careful not to leave traces behind in writing. Then there are the articles and studies which contain sometimes shocking simplifications, distortions, or even eulogies of Stalin. What can be behind these? Was there anything other than what survives in writing? To answer this, Kadarkay tries to discern differences between the opinions of Lukács the public figure and Lukács the private citizen. He examines the masks which characterized him in his earlier period: the Silenus mask, that of the erstwhile professional, now the ideologue. Lukács himself hints at one of the masks in characterizing the acceptance of the official ideology's catch-words with such a label as allows the attentive reader to sense a criticism of the system. Hence the mask is a useful metaphor. But what lies behind it? Kadarkay is unwilling to guess, and we are left with a question mark.

We could suggest a mosaic of possible answers. One such is Lukács' concept of political activity. Kadarkay is right to point out that the ideologue replaces the philosopher during this period, a role which can shape history, and hence the world. This is a role which—though it may exist as a hypothesis—he is unwilling to renounce. It requires that he remain a party member (which was his grave, historic error), that he not be excluded. This explains the constant self-criticism and his self-humiliation, the inner ascetic compulsion at all costs. He paid dearly for this through the abandonment of his friends, the disparagement of his colleagues, the loss of philosophical face, and the publication of a number of poor quality writings. It was a fatal error.

It was fatal because Lukács was unaware of his own significance. He was ever afraid that he would be expelled by the CP, thus losing his influence on the intellectuals of the Left. Karl Korsch's fate served as a cautionary tale. Karl Korsch, a friend of Lukács's youth and noted Marx-scholar of the 1920s, was accused of Trotskyism and expelled from the CP. This made it impossible for him to continue to influence the movement. Lukács often referred to Korsch, arguing that he would not allow himself to be silenced by the use of such methods. The example is not a good one, for Lukács's *oeuvre* and reputation would have assured him the freedom to remain an independent thinker on the intellectual scene. As regards developments in the movement, he did not have much of a say anyway.

The other, equally plausible explanation lies in the early history of the communist reform movement. Let me add a few words on this subject with which Kadarkay is not really familiar. The roots of opposition to the Stalinist system lie in the factional struggles of the Hungarian Communist Party, and in the debates and occasional fights to the death between the Béla Kun and Landler factions. Well before Stalin, Kun and his faction manifested a political style which the Great Teacher later elevated to a higher level, using the methods of denunciation, murder, lies, and manipulation. In contrast, the Landler faction, though not perceiving as clearly as we can today, the devastation of the Stalinism which was to come, nonetheless strove for a socialism "with a human face." The bitter irony of the Stalinist system is that it executed more members of the Kun faction than of Landler's: yet this is pre-

cisely whence in Hungary Rákosi and Gerő derived their political methods. Of course there were "confusions of origin" on both sides: Révai, The Hungarian Zhdanov, came from the Landler faction, while József Lengyel, writer of fine novels and stories about the Gulag, came from Kun's faction.

The faction was disbanded at the beginning of the '20s, but the connections and personal relationships—as well as the Landler legend—persisted and, I think, later gave rise to the reform movements which began after Stalin's death. (Major studies by Lukács smuggled to the West between 1958 and 1964, which deal with the structure of Stalinism, and offer a passionate criticism of its operating principles, can be better understood from this vantage point. As the secret ideologue of this faction, Lukács gathered these critical elements in the 1930s and 1940s, but kept them to himself. It was only after '56 that he felt ready to publicize these reform ideas internationally, doing so openly and in a systematic form.)

Of course, this group had no clearly articulated philosophy. They were not driven by the image of an alternative form of socialism: for the most part, their existence was primarily the mere embodiment of an attitude. Lukács tried to fill this void by giving their different mode of behaviour a quasi-theoretical foundation in Gottfried Keller (as Kadarkay points out) or Hegel. But we should avoid the creation of any illusions by emphasizing that this budding theory was also founded on anti-democratic arguments: Kadarkay rightly sees that Lukács simply had no feel for a truly democratic structure. But the time had not yet come for the evolution of a radically different model of socialism.

Whatever the case, in Lukács' better works of the '30s, his daily experiences come to the surface in a manner similar to the essays of *The Soul and the Forms*, though here his treatment is more esoteric: one objectionable sentence, and the GPU would be at the door. This metaphorical manner of expression naturally exhibited the historical inhibitions of an opposition thinker. Lukács himself was uncertain whether political life should be corrected under the Stalinist system, or whether steps should be taken in a different direction. Nonetheless, I feel that this is what was behind the mask, and was palpable in the bloody political circumstances of the time, though not a trace of it is to be found either in writings or memory.

The opposition thinkers had to negotiate an ethical trap as well: the survival imperative. Only the survivor would be around to say what was right. This is what lies behind the logic of staying within the system at all costs. It is a vicious circle, a trap of illusions.

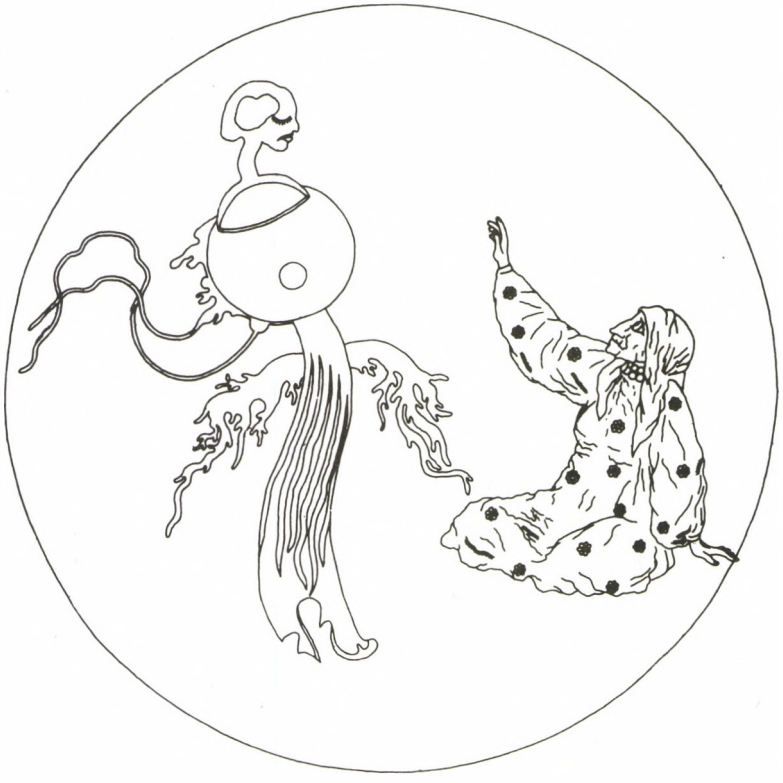
Finally, I would mention the fear which so permeates this period. As Kadarkay writes, Lukács became a stoic, but this was not enough to eliminate this factor in the meat-grinder of the '30s. The decision to remain inside the system at all costs was motivated by the bloody historical context, though viewed through the eyeglasses of Lukács' political naiveté: as an insider, he was much more likely to end up in the Gulag than if he had left the movement. (It is a miracle that he was freed after his arrest. Did he grow any the wiser as a result? One cannot tell but perhaps someday the minutes of the interrogation will come to light from the NKVD archives.)

Kadarkay sees in Lukács' fate the outlines of an Eastern European intellectual's tragedy: I hope that the elements I have added serve to complete the finely documented image of a philosopher's tragedy the book presents.

The book ends rather abruptly. In discussing Lukács' last major work, *The Specific of Aesthetics*, it deals only with problematic concepts (the concept of realism, mimesis, the specific). This serves

the end of defining for the reader the reasons for Lukács' third death. We hear about the *Ontology* only on the level of concrete events, but the debate among his students and the questions which arise are scarcely examined. Lukács' role in the revolution of 1956 is given similarly cursory treatment, though the little-known story of his deportation to Snagov in Rumania with Imre Nagy is handled at greater length. But these years saw an important attempt to rise from his first death: after 1956, he established contact with his students Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, Mihály Vajda, István Eörsi, and György Márkus, a move that took him closer to life and to politics.

His third death was after all inevitable, it was brought about by the collapse of communism. His system of thought has little relevance to the new situation. Elements will no doubt survive, but the attitude and metaphysics have become superfluous. History, however, has brought about not only the failure of the Soviet system, but has also raised the crucial question to what extent the causes of communism and socialism can be separated. Lukács clung so blindly to his membership in the Communist Party because he saw no other possibility for the survival of socialism. Now, for the first time, it is possible to make sense of this distinction. It is a posthumous tragedy that his third death was caused by this, and that he who, as a Marxist, sought in secret the possibility of an answer to the question, cannot participate in the debate of our time.



Miklós Györffy

From Chapter to Novel

Ádám Bodor: *Sinistra körzet* (Sinistra District), Magvető, 1992, 158 pp; László Krasznahorkai: *Az urgai fogoly* (Prisoner in Urga), Széphalom Könyvműhely, 1992, 142 pp; Péter Lengyel: *Holnapelőtt* (The Day Before Tomorrow), Jelenkor Irodalmi és Művészeti Kiadó, 1992, 211 pp.

The setting and subject of Ádám Bodor's latest volume of prose is easy to locate and yet it cannot be found on any map. The setting is somewhere in the Carpathians, on the Rumanian side of the Rumanian-Ukrainian border, the text intimates, but the best one can do is to seek a model for it under some different name. The text also provides footholds concerning the time, which is the present, or the recent past. However, there are no references that point to the political role and background of this region. It is a more or less closed territory, strictly controlled by the military or the police under a forest commissioner, who commands the mountain riflemen and has been dispatched from some distant, outlying place. Since Rumania in the recent past was a dictatorship ruled by Ceausescu, and with the knowledge that Ádám Bodor is a Transylvanian Hungarian whose previous collection included a story of gruesome bizarre internment and exile[1], there can be no doubt as to the reality and personal experience which was the inspiration. But this district of Sinistra is not a communist camp or penal settlement, but a literary fiction, a metaphorical province. As its name indicates, it is a dark and baleful region whose inhabitants live in a captivity that resembles some kind of self-imposed—or enforced—exile.

"Chapters of a novel," is the subtitle of *Sinistra District*, which consists of a cycle of fifteen stories, each of which can be read in its own right as well. Several have indeed been published separately. Placed side by side, however, they seem to make up a novel, with a beginning and end; the basic information on the district and its inhabitants though recurs chapter by chapter, in the form required by the independent life of the relevant story. Thus, for instance, some piece of information, already known, is reiterated about the narrator and one of the chief characters—Andrej Bodor. He is both alter ego of the writer and of an anonymous anybody who, having arrived in the district, has cast off his former identity and wears his pseudonym Andrej Bodor as a dogtag. Nothing is known about his past and all we learn about his purpose in coming here is that he is looking for his foster son. Certain signs seem to indicate that the son is here in the district. He may have come here voluntarily, and he could

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[1] "The Out-Station", *NHQ* 101. See another story of the cycle, "Epidemic in Dobrin," in *NHQ* 125.

even escape if he put his mind to it, (as he finally does, to Greece, in a refrigerated lorry carrying frozen mutton). At the same time, he seems to come under the forest commissioner, and his various deputies as an internee. They know nothing about him, (his file is blank) and even seem to be able to read Bodor's mind: they know he is looking for his foster son and considering how to escape. The first forest commissioner is a colonel; after his mysterious death even his name cannot be uttered again. He is followed by another colonel, a thin, musty woman, who moves around in a jeep. They shower various errands on Bodor, carried out without any display of emotions on his part: he soon turns into one of the spectral figures of the district. The rest of them figure in Bodor's narratives.

All the characters are the means and the victims of an absurd, self-contained functioning of the district. Just as in the case of Andrej Bodor, how they have arrived here and what they have to do with the wretched life they are living is simply not known. The district is surrounded by high mountains, with a few scattered farmsteads in which lurk surly, insidious, feral peasants. There is a wretched little town called Dobrin "City", the forest commissioner's seat. He has his dirty little office there, and the city also figures all kinds of degraded, animal-like beings—officials, tradesmen, railwaymen, Gabriel Dunka the dwarf, who tarnishes glass by treading sand on it in the Sinistra prison, and Colonel Tomoioaga, the coroner, all of them drinking methylated spirits filtered through coal or mushrooms from morning to night. The women service the men. A railway trolley can take you to the reserve beyond the rail barrier, where hundreds of bears are kept. (What for? Perhaps for the dictator to hunt?) This is also the den of Géza Hutira, a meteorologist and rapist, whose hair reaches to the ground. It is as his protégé that Andrej Bodor's deranged foster son leads his semiconscious life. "Mixed up in something," and therefore brought to the district, he does not want to hear of his foster father delivering him from here.

A special dash of colour in the sometimes morbid vegetation of these freakish individuals is provided by their names: Béla Bundasian, Mustafa Mukkerman, Petrika Hamza, Coca Mavrodin-Mahmudia, Connie Illafeld, Zoltán Marmorstein, Elvira and Severin Spiridon—absurdly compounded names that bear the marks of all the nations of Eastern Europe, from Turks through Hungarians and Rumanians to Germans. This nomenclature, along with the grotesque, nightmarish district depicted with both folk-ballad and surreal devices, aims at a metaphor valid for all of Eastern Europe. This district is a world which is dictatorially organized, controlled and denuded on the one hand, absolutely incapable of functioning and grotesquely exploitable on the other.

Nevertheless, this gruesome version of human misery and baseness looks like a small refuse dump compared with the omnipotence of nature. In Sinistra Nature is the supreme master. In every dreadful episode Bodor portrays with extraordinary power the vast transfigurations of the mountain landscape, usually neither beautiful nor ugly but simply elementary. People in Sinistra are literally earth-bound under the large-scale processes taking place in the air. This also explains the mysterious disease, the "Tungusian cold", which is carried by waxwings from the North when winter comes. It is this disease that finally carries away both forest commissioners.

The setting of *Sinistra District* is reminiscent of *Sátántangó* (Satan's Tango), László Krasznahorkai's novel of a few years ago.[2] In it, too, the setting is

[2] See *NHQ* 104 for an excerpt.

a fiendish "district", an Eastern European inferno, peopled with the mentally maimed and governed by the irrational nature of some unknown power. Nature, in the form of rain and mist, plays an oppressive role there too. Now in *Prisoner in Urga*, Krasznahorkai has published a cycle whose parts fall into a connected, united whole, somewhat like the chapters in Ádám Bodor's book. It is difficult to tell what exactly the outcome should be called: whether it is a novel, a travelogue, a book of travels or simply a collection of stories. The author has travelled through the late Soviet Union, Mongolia and China, and narrated some of the experiences which influenced his life.

Krasznahorkai went to the East not as a holidaymaker, nor as scholar, but in quest of the limits of his own self, or rather, of what lies beyond the limits that had confined him within a European way of life and thought. Mongolia and the gruesome train journey across the Gobi Desert constitute that ghostly border where the traveller steps off maps drawn to European concepts of articulation and perspicuity, and enters the dazzling and weird medium of disarticulation, infinity and desolation, where different facts and different certainties provide the guiding principle. All bounds are dictated here by the monotony of a perfection that cannot be further enhanced, in short, the eternity of death, this is what encompasses the traveller between Urga and Beijing, before he enters China.

China for Krasznahorkai is like a dream, like the miracle which restores man's faith. Beijing provides for him the ethereal innocence of faith, conviction, heavenly relations and the vision of secret wonders. Still, on his first evening in Beijing, when he casts his eyes up to the starlit sky from the balcony of his quarters, it is the fatal limitation of himself and a sense of exclusion that materialize before him like an illumination: in a Dantean turn, he is showered with "most profound" questions, like "dark forests" from the Beijing sky. In this near operatic situation, he suddenly realizes that "I shall not find that which I am, seeking not because it does not exist but because I am blind to find it, to the end of time." Before he has seen anything of China, he is hit by the recognition that he would be unable to step over his shadow, he will have no real miracle happen to him, he will not find something he had not been aware of so far or learn something he had not known so far—the nature of things will not be more understandable for him in China either. So even before his China account begins, the reader must realize that he cannot expect such a story.

Yet, China has a message for him, it provides an opportunity for him to ponder over its unapproachable magic, to yearn for its secrets, and finally it provides a nostalgia for the illusion which China has in fact not realized. One of the embodiments of this mysterious beauty in these confessional stories is Chinese opera or, rather, an actress who is its perfect cultivator. Krasznahorkai devotes two stories to this experience. One, "The Goddess has Written", is in the form of a fictitious letter, the actress's reply to a series (64 in all) of his—obviously likewise fictitious—letters to her, to this point in time unanswered. The flood of letters from the almost rapturous European fills the actress with a certain embarrassment and even sorrow, since reading the letters makes her think of the writer looking for a different face behind her own, which he has seen only once. A player in Chinese opera reaches perfection only when she is no longer an actor and has no face other than her stage face. The story "There is a Seal on the Gates", revives the memorable performance itself, this time from the point of view of the writer, who is enthralled precisely by that which separates him forever from her: a perfect identification with beauty and the illusion of being attainable. This "captivity" prompts

him to write the letters, to which the sad final answer in the name of the goddess is: "And, dear Krasznahorkai, do not look for me. Love Beijing, but do not think you can enter the stage, where I live."

The author also falls into another kind of captivity, that of Southern China, which has an almost fatal consequence: such is the alienness of this region that the unsuspecting traveller falls ill and misses Quangzhou. Finally he falls into the captivity of Urga which provides the title of the volume. "Only Ten More Years" is perhaps the best in the volume. On his way home, the writer, both longing for home and to be back in China, has to wait three days for his aircraft in Urga, perhaps the dreariest, most disconsolate town in the whole world. But the wait leads to an unexpected and memorable encounter with a Buddhist lama who, in the heart of Mongolia, gives him the experience of gratifying human nearness, and a kind of a future sense of this nearness. *Captive in Urga* ends with the exciting prospect of the once immensely and magically distant year 2000, at the time of the journey a mere ten years off—the promise of the advent of nearness.

Though described as a "non-novel", Péter Lengyel's *The Day Before Tomorrow* also aspires to make a composition out of various unrelated chapters, which were originally perhaps not even intended to belong together. These are diary notes, essayistic reflections, whose assemblage ought to produce a non-fiction which naturally aspires to be a novel, a non-recurring variety of the novel—a post-modern novel, in fact. The subtitle indicates the subject as "89-90-91", this great period of historical transformation, as the writer saw it and lived it through. These years were creating our tomorrow, and this is the sense that Lengyel sees in them as the day before tomorrow.

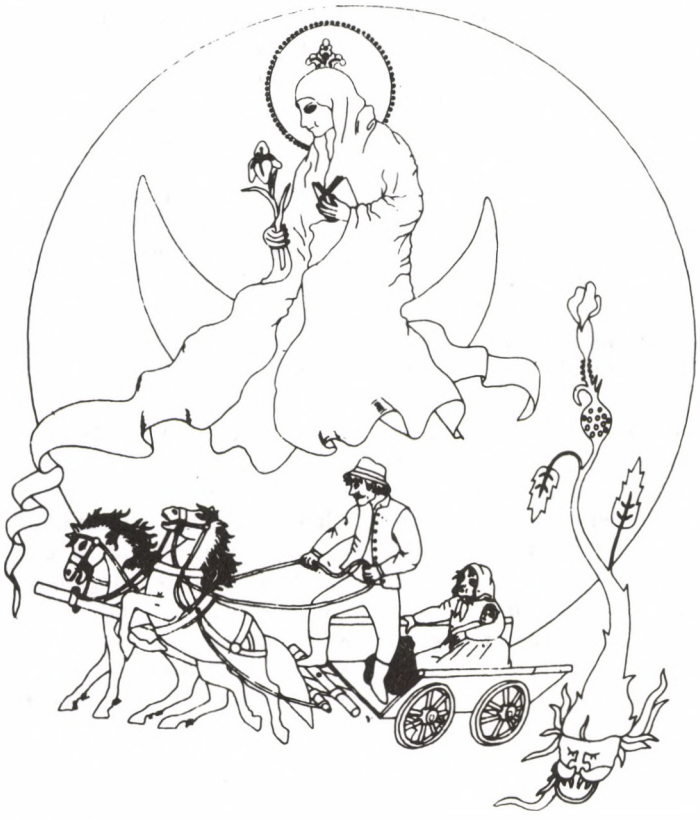
Each of the pieces has already been published. They are fragmentary confessions which portray the author meditating about himself, his profession, his environment, and the world. In the first, brief piece, "Curriculum", he introduces himself, as it were, to the reader. Episodes then follow, such as the thirtieth anniversary of the appearance of a novel which served as a model for him, his German studies which had been "delayed" until he turned fifty, and another model, a legendary periodical and the generation of writers linked to it. They all provide opportunities to speak on what is momentarily holding his attention. Historical reality first appears among reflections in connection with the Rumanian revolution. As premised in a "Praescriptum", this has lost its validity by the time of the appearance of the volume, since hindsight has put the events in a different light. A revolution, which all the signs seem to indicate only seemed to be a revolution, has further aggravated the oppression of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania. This also points to something which is the subject and source of tension of much of the volume, namely that the events of these three years all pose the threat of invalidating themselves and suppressing the morrow.

Occasions for further reflections are provided by satellite TV, the spread of the free flow of information, the East German Stasi, socio-psychological symptoms in the change of political systems, a "peace-time" holiday in a still relatively unspoiled village, the subjects of a Western European conference of intellectuls, a university writing seminar, islands of the "civilian country" and society which have survived collectivistic destruction, etc. Lengyel inserts into this mosaic a long conversation with the editor of a periodical, in which he tries to state his credo as a novelist, his view of parts of a novel concerting with each other. This "non-novelistic" montage of the parts of a novel also includes textual finds of a kind of a fictitious or real liter-

ary notebook, with captions and cross references in fragmentary and coded form, which the uninitiated reader is in most cases unable to break. Even the textual evidence for the difficulties and various phases of the publication, printing, and proof corrections of the book are incorporated—up to a point where the snake is biting its own tail.

Lengyel's subjective comments on the developments which shape his own tomorrow and that of his environment, express the standpoint of a liberal intellectual who is susceptible to both the traditional and the new. In the plethora of statements, comments, explanations, subjective and objective interpretations, which have flooded the Hungarian press, he stands out not so much for the originality of his views, nor even for his eye-catching style of expression, but more for his sober "civic" consistency, his limiting himself to his own profession as a writer. The utter confusion of the present situation is well indicated by the fact that sometimes even this cool and reticent intellect strays into priggery, pedantry and a compulsion to have his say on things.

I do not think that all this would make up a new variety of the novel. *The Day Before Tomorrow* is simply a collection of reflections, with a modicum of post-modern garnish. To my mind Ádám Bodor's and László Krasznahorkai's chapters come much closer to making up the sought-for singular, non-recurring new variety of the novel.



Gergely Hajdú

Quantity, Quality, Quietus

Amy Károlyi: *Mindenért mindent* (All for All). Jelenkor, 1992, 116 pp.; György Somlyó: *Nem titok* (No secret). Jelenkor, 1992, 75 pp.; Flóra Imre: *Merőleges idő* (Perpendicular Time). Interart-Arion, 1992, 85 pp.; Idem: *Rondó*. Tevan, 1992, 163 pp.; Ottó Orbán: *Egyik oldaláról a másikra fordul; él* (He Turns from One Side to the Other; He's Alive). Magvető, 1992, 107 pp..

It is somewhat strange to find Amy Károlyi's poems in the very successful series from Jelenkor (an off-shoot of the excellent literary magazine of the same name, published in Pécs). The uniform format, the unpretentious typography usual for volumes of poems do not seem to become her, a writer unfashionably taking "not the race track but another subterranean one running under it." An album format, with lots of green and dark pink would suit her better: some of her earlier poems had an excellent foil provided by Arnold Gross's nostalgic and decadent drawings redolent of 19th century Biedermeyer.

Amy Károlyi (the widow of the great poet Sándor Weöres) is, to use one of her favourite expressions, a poet of frontiers. She is preoccupied with the borderline of the temporal and the transcendental worlds, with the small signs of ultimate reality; one could equally think of the borderlines falling at either end of adulthood. Her interest in the process of dying stems from her sensitivity to the eternal and escatological. Not coincidentally, her favourite author is Emily Dickinson; her translations and essays have made the American poet known to Hungarian readers. However, Amy Károlyi is of a gentler disposition, with the same implacable demand for purity but without Emily Dickinson's hardness. Times are different, of course; in Amy Károlyi, particularly in her directly religious verse, the ironic strain (often reinforced by impossibly perfect rhymes) is much stronger. These pieces are rather reminiscent of Stevie Smith.

On the other hand, the didactic mood and the manner of the romantic tale show she is not far from the other border of adulthood, either. Not unlike Goethe or Petőfi, a not negligible part of her work is made up of moral epigrams and aphorisms—mostly in some banal metre, such as the iambic tetrameter. The keepsake albums of adolescent girls are today the sole preserve of this once respectable tradition. Amy Károlyi, however, has enough poetic power to make us forget the assumptions and expectations of the

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modern age. It is nice to be *tête á tête* with these trivia, intimate despite their severity, even though we cannot avoid wondering if we are reading platitudes or profundities.

Amy Károlyi's poetry has remained basically unchanged since she began writing more than fifty years ago, although her range of poetic devices has been extended. Particular traits of hers are mistakenly attributed to her husband's influence. Their work is clearly linked by several threads—not that Weöres needed to be "complemented" by anyone. One of his special features was to contemplate the world simultaneously through the eyes of man, a woman and a child. Amy Károlyi bears the role of literary widow, to some an embarrassment, with angelic equanimity. (The present volume contains a number of memories and reminiscences of Weöres, his sayings and gestures, preserved in longer prose compositions in which she is not really at home.) Likewise, she endures her other social roles—in the knowledge that they have little to do with the real meaning of life.

Her poem *Látletet egy ismerős arcról* (Medical report on a familiar face) sums up life's afflictions surreally engraved in the skin of a face. She finds the symbol of evanescent dreams, so typical of her, in a crumpled pillow. "What marshes and swamps, / what bloated witches / came stealing under the sodic land, / and swelled the angular, the ascetic, / until his face became a used pillow? / What could have happened, what rockslide, / landslide, long in preparation, / buried the rails? / The stern, the well-composed, / the familiar features. / That train was decay / that ran over the rails." (Prose translation.)

Another poem, part of a satirical portrait, deserves attention because it touches upon a problem that crops up to some extent with the next three poets under review: "In sleeve protectors he scribbles words, / much will do for quality. / Quantity is transformed into quality, say the wise." The three are anything but petty bourgeois let loose on poetry, but they do seem to occasionally put too much trust in the Hegelian thesis.

For György Somlyó, Jelenkor have broken with their custom by commissioning illustrations, very reminiscent of Picasso. If the drawings had more original value, the choice could have been a happy one in that Somlyó has always been receptive to the attractions of the Mediterranean. He began writing around 1940, after the great age of experiment. Apollinaire and Valéry were his first models, and they and others quickly made his receptivity evident. Although French poetry in the fifties lost and has not yet regained the prestige it maintained for centuries, Somlyó translated French poets (along with Spanish and Latin American poets) by the dozen. It is mainly thanks to him that the Romance language poetry of the period since the war has not remained a blank for Hungarian readers, though the poets he introduced have never really become popular in this country. Somlyó has an impressive erudition and is the author of several theoretical works on poetry; he is thus able to write in any measured prosodic form he chooses—and is equally adept in free verse. He has a sense of humour too. A sense of proportion, however, does not seem to be one of his strong points. His own work is at times characterized by a kind of verbosity. At other times, however, he succeeds in turning his limitations into virtues. The present volume presents some decidedly successful pieces. He often takes the eroticism of old age as a theme; he is capable of evoking, precisely by a kind of loose formulation, its restricted sensory scale, the obsessional thought concentrating on one object, for example, a pair of knees in the poem *Szemben ülve* (Sitting Opposite). The "old-fashioned" ideal of a life subordinated to culture fills him with pride, to which is added the peculiar self-

confidence of a man who can expect to die in bed in an age fraught with scarcely imaginable horrors and disasters. "Once you are old—but who knows you / Will be?—Or are we the last ones of this kind perhaps, / Survivors many times over, whom only the cockroach, this species with a great future, will survive," begins the fourth piece in the cycle called *New Sonnets of Ronsard to his New Helen.* This is the finest part of the volume, for the constraints of form keep him from rambling. He violates the rules of poetics only within the terms of the evoked poetic ideal—but this works, for even those brought up on the avantgarde can appreciate the beauty of relative irregularity.

Disillusion is naturally not missing from a sonnet cycle playing with the point of view of old age. He draws on several tragicomic syndromes of Budapest, the "Bangkokification" of the capital, of the rapid spread of prostitution of all kinds, from the most vulgar to the most intellectual. Amorous experience, he says with melancholy regret, cannot claim for itself the rank of Heaven and Hell any more than it could in the age of Petrarch. Yet at the end he leaves a taste of pure sentiment: "Late, I can only reflect / that not I will weep for her—my Helen, / in tears, will cast a look at me to the other shore."

Flóra Imre is the youngest and, very likely, the most remarkable of the three poets under consideration here. She is certainly an adroit master of language: with the assurance of a virtuoso, she tries her hand at countless forms, ranging from those of Antiquity to those of the Provencal troubadours which she is particularly partial to. (Nevertheless, she is not ashamed of using the comfortable iamb or the alexandrine if they suit her subject best.) Her imagination produces uniquely lifelike images, despite the clearly discernible influences on her work. Among them is Apollinaire, already mentioned in connection with Somlyó, and she too makes frequent allusion to the Pléiade. All the same, she is less able to make the best use of her talent than others—among them Amy Károlyi—who can maximize their poetic resources. Flóra Imre has had two volumes, some 180 poems altogether, published this year. Given that six years have passed since her first collection, this is not really much. Nevertheless, it somehow makes the impression of a continuous mass of poems. Most express the same experience, some pieces are little differentiated from one another. This leads to the breakdown of the careful design of *Rondo*, in which she works hard at constructing a sequence of poems and cycles into a hyper-structure, a gigantic rondo. In addition, the poems contain less and less relaxed passages around the ecstatic core of experience. She tries to maintain a ceaseless intensity, which can cause the over-taxed reader's attention to flag or even to tune out completely.

The experience is the moment when some meaningfulness starts to emanate from the Things and you begin to comprehend that you are an infinitesimal part of the macrocosm. It would be wrong to think that this is an indulgence in facile or naive philosophizing. She has an excellent knowledge of the philosophers of antiquity, especially of Plotinus (she teaches Greek and Latin), she is equally at home in modern science and is bold enough to assimilate a surprising amount of both. Primarily, however, she is interested in the senses rather than what is expressible through concepts. Her outlook is anatomical in its nature. In a kind of panerotic mood she goes on listing how the Things, the other components of the World's Great Animal (*mega zoon*) impinge upon her epidermis and nerves. This touch is a sort of "link of links" with her; even vision is a subspecies of it. A characteristic example: "Trees. Planetrees. Whispering in the wind / Under the clear, camphoric sky. / (...) And some outline emerges / Just beyond the limit of

sight. / As you look, cold slaps your naked eyes. (...) / The eternal straining of the muscles / To hold the hardly tangible, / The look widening out to touch, / You feel everything with a diaphanous, new skin."

Those familiar with the poetry of the late Ágnes Nemes Nagy will see much that is common to both of them. They share an inclination to play-act, a predilection to speak through personae. That outstanding poet, who died last year, also liked to explore the meaning of objects difficult to put in words; because she believed so strongly in the existence of this meaning, one critic described her thinking as scholastic. Yet Nemes Nagy's insistence on strict construction is not generally characteristic of her younger fellow poet; Ágnes Nemes Nagy would never have conceived of an idea or image that was not justified by the whole of the poem. With a degree of simplification, one could suppose that Flóra Imre's characteristics as a poet are traceable to Neoplatonism, that values the imaginative faculty so excessively, but poetry is not theology. The poems most peculiarly pagan are those on biblical themes, simply because their approach is almost completely sensuous. She is a highly individual follower of Plotinus of Alexandria. In speaking of the journey of the soul from the One into Matter and back, it is not at all clear which part of the journey is degradation: "approaching the one essence / the soul forgets itself / (...) and nothing already the invisible radiance / fills every crease and the final extraspatial / silence settles in the naked matter."

Ottó Orbán frequently alludes to his horrible experiences in 1944, one of them being the moment when a dud shell fell a few yards away from him, as well as to his experiences right after the war: the pathos of starting again. These memories and "the faith in the cosmic vocation of poetry" made him a poet, he says. His choice of form, however, calls for an explanation; while he exploits the short prose genres and the essay (which he regards as incidental) very resourcefully, his poetry often offers something other than lyricism. In the 60s he was one of many who shared the opinion that the gravity of the subject, preferably with a world historical importance, and outspoken expression are the hallmarks of really significant poetry—a view most would regard as journalism today. The trials of history no doubt may have a propitious effect on the development of a poet (take some Northern Irish writers whom we can thank for what are probably the finest poems in English written in the last thirty years or so), but Orbán sometimes was prone to react to these ordeals perhaps too directly. The spontaneity he learnt from Gregory Corso and others didn't help much, seeing how easily this could degenerate into prolixity over there too.

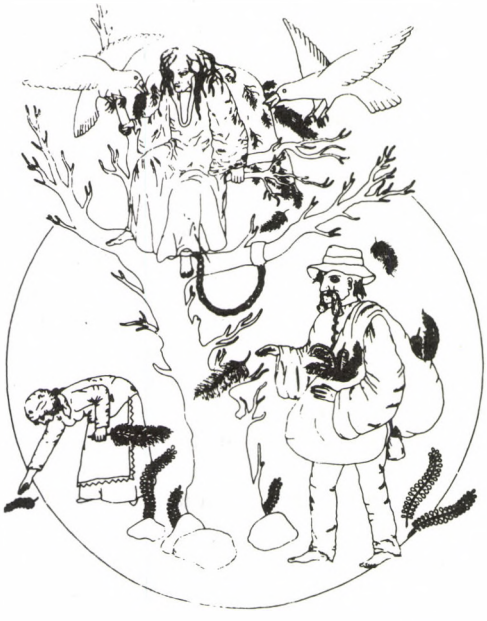
Orbán's last two volumes have brought a change which can hardly be called felicitous, since it stems from his serious illness and fear of death. He now feels that shell of long ago in his cells, in the momentary dead silence after the impact. In that moment, he finds the words that make us believe that all the tragic events of the world have something to do with him. "The polluted lands, our wars and our love affairs speak of us / but chiefly that which we conceive of the universe as a human: while the first mad heartbeat, the Big Bang, / still pounding away in his chest, his body is already expanding, fragmenting, flying to a billion times billion."

His most frequently employed verse tactic is simple but elastic. First he sets out the facts, precisely and uncompromisingly, (occasionally straying from the main theme if he feels like it): an old photo of a coterie of friends that has broken up, the depressing atmosphere of Seoul, a temporary paralysis and so on. Much of this is daily topicality "between

the metal jaws of the East Central European squeezer", in keeping with a life dominated by politics. The second half makes a balance, renouncing the gestures of the imagination, which he thinks all illusions, from "political fads" to ultimate hope: "We all hope for a Renaissance bugle call, / that we can sit up in our coffins and hit our noses into a new world." (As can be seen, he likes to end a poem with a punchline.)

Orbán embroils himself ceaselessly with critics, academics, professors, and even those fellow poets he clearly envies, chiefly the postmodernists. He seems to uphold some late Romantic principles, such as "the need for wholeness, (...) and that the essence is the life salvaged in the poetry, briefly, the blood." These are sentiments he inherits from one of the great classics of Hungarian poetry, Endre Ady, and he represents them with a degree of self-confidence for which only Ady's oeuvre could have provided justification. Of himself he likes to use images that are immodest or inflated—Golem or mammoth—and boasts of his craftsmanship, though always with a self-irony that is in no way characteristic of Ady.

In contrast, where Orbán confronts his own hopes with the facts, where he breaks with the ideal of a well-shaped life, his agony is indeed moving. He is at his most effective when he uses panoramic pictures to speak of the fate of his generation and the simplest of means to speak of himself. The latter is exploited in his title poem, which he disguises as a prose poem, although it is largely dactylic, often in the metre of the Greek mourning songs, the *adoneus*. "Tiny village oppressed like a heart amidst the hills; cardiac-livid houses, muddy lanes crooked as a dog's hind leg. From here you can only see God's feet, his shiny nails glisten in the wind. ... In the drink of the boundless sweetness the angostura bark: at four in the morning I know while watching the sleeping mind's film that all is in vain, despite the radiance, the geese cackle, the smell of the earth and grass and dung, there is no starting again."



Melinda Berlász

László Lajtha and T. S. Eliot

The composer László Lajtha's London journey was a gift of those relatively free years between 1945 and 1949 which had promised so much. His visit was just one example of quickening relations. In 1947 and 1948, many prominent Hungarian writers, artists, and musicians took up again the threads cut off by the war, many of them enjoying grants or scholarships.

Lajtha spent March and April of 1947 in Paris and London. This first post-war journey yielded an unexpected result, not in France, but during his short stay in Britain. The film director Georges Hoellering, an old colleague of Lajtha's, commissioned him to write music for a film of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* he was planning to make.

Collaboration between Lajtha and the Austrian film director went back more than ten years. They had first met during the shooting of a documentary on the Hortobágy in Hungary.[1] By that time Hoellering had long committed himself to the cause of the underprivileged, a commitment which between 1930 and 1933 led him to join Brecht; after 1931 he made a film on the Berlin Kuhle Wampe. In the mid-1930s his interest in the lives of Hungarian shepherds brought him to Hungary to shoot a documentary.[2]

He worked for more than a year on location, and first asked Bartók to write the background music. Bartók advised him to turn to Lajtha, who, on seeing the film and recognizing its qualities, undertook the commission. The novelist Zsigmond Móricz wrote a framework story for this, the first documentary shot on the Hortobágy. (Móricz's short story, *A komor ló* (The Gloomy Horse) also owes its origin to this collaboration).[3]

Hortobágy was never shown in Hungary. The spread of fascism made it impossible. From 1937 onwards Hoellering worked in London, and after completing work on the documentary *Hortobágy*, he and Lajtha did not meet.

A chance for their coming together again was provided by Lajtha's two-week visit to London from March l6 to April l, 1947. On the second day after his arrival, Lajtha wrote to his family:

"Here in London, too, I was immersed in work from the start. This, for the time being, meant talking to Hoellering. I left Paris at eleven o'clock on Sunday—and we embraced at the London railway station at ten in the evening... After arrival in London, Sunday night we talked with Hoellering until half past three. Yesterday, on Monday night that is, we went to bed early, having finished our discussion by half past one..." [4]

They took up their conversation at the point it had been broken off before the war. At Hoellering's suggestion, Lajtha

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gave a talk on the film they had collaborated on, *Hortobágy*, on the BBC Third Programme; he took this chance to express his views on film music.[5]

This first letter from London makes no mention of any plans for future co-operation, but the second letter, dated eleven days later, informs the family of an accomplished fact:

"The second positive thing is that I am to write the music for *Murder in the Cathedral*. It became positive only the day before yesterday. T.S. Eliot's contract allows him to have a say in everything, and everything can be done only with his agreement. I first met him the day before yesterday. Hoelle was somewhat anxious (he denies it, but I could see it in him: mainly from the way he wanted to coach me; in a kind, well-meaning and nice manner.) Of course, reality turned out absolute differently..."[6]

The same letter reports his encounter with Eliot:

"First we just talked. Then we turned to the play. I told him how I envisaged the musical arrangement. How I have shaped the music and how my intended music would shape the part of the play itself I wished to set to the music.

"At first Eliot kept silent, he just kept silent—and then he interrupted me and enthused—and finally he said few people understood his poetic concept as well as I did. In a modest and kind voice: 'It is only your music that will make the film the real thing, it will help a great deal and will elevate my words, my thoughts and ideas.'

"He made no objection to anything. Upon his departure (the planned half an hour grew into an hour and a half) we took leave in a warm, friendly manner. Hoelle was beaming with joy. Also with pride. After all, I am *his* musician. He said, Eliot is an acute critic, and utterly sincere, and if he did not like something absolutely, he always expressed this in one way or other."[7]

Hoellering first read Eliot's verse play on Becket, written in 1935, when he was interned in the war. It was only after the war "that he met the poet and persuaded him to allow the play to be turned into a film." [8]

These were the things clarified in the spring of 1947. But as Lajtha had to return urgently to Paris, no contract could be signed at the time.

Although *Murder in the Cathedral* was performed by the Hungarian National Theatre in 1938, Lajtha knew Eliot's work was not widely known in Hungary. "You at home do not even know what a great man he is here. Or, rather, not only here but in the whole English reading world. Well!... Do not say more at home, only this much: they are adapting *Murder* for the screen together with T.S. Eliot and Hoellering. And this is a great thing."[9]

The planning and preparations were concluded in the spring of 1947 in London. On returning home, Lajtha cleared up that summer some practical issues concerning his working year in London.[10] Whether he corresponded with Eliot at this time is not known. But it is possible that the agreement at their first encounter was an adequate basis for Lajtha to start composition in August 1947, while still in Budapest. [11]

The coffee table book, published by Harcourt Brace in 1952 in New York, which contains the ideas of the playwright and the film director, is a rarity in the history of the cinema.[12] It was presumably published for the first showing of the Hoellering—Eliot production in New York at the Trans-Lux Picture Palace. The richly illustrated volume opens with prefaces by the author and the director, in which they express their views on the collaboration. The complete, final English script of the film may well never have been published elsewhere.

Eliot's preface is highly informative. First he writes on the differences between the possibilities inherent in the film and

László Lajtha travelled the three-lane highway staked out by Bartók and Kodály. He devoted his life to composing, to ethnomusicology, and to teaching.

Lajtha was born in Budapest, on the 30th of June 1892, to middle class parents. He studied composition at the Academy of Music, under the direction of Viktor Herzfeld, obtaining his diploma in 1913. That same year he also graduated in law. It was, however, on visits to Leipzig, Geneva and Paris that he experienced the music which most inspired his youth.

He obtained his first major successes at home and abroad at the end of the twenties and in the early thirties. His String Quartet was given the Coolidge Prize, and his ballet Lysistrata, *to a text by Lajos Árpily, was performed at the Budapest Opera.*

His interest in folk music was aroused in the 1910s and, after an interruption due to the Great War, he was engaged in ethnomusicology right up to his death. He was on the staff of the Museum of Ethnography between 1913 and 1949, including a short stretch as Acting Director.

His work as a composer owes a great deal to his links with Triton, a contemporary music circle in Paris. In Paris, in the thirties, he also participated in the activities of Cooperation Intellectuelle, as well as establishing close relations with Leduc, the Paris publishers.

In the years of the coalition government which followed the Second World War, Lajtha filled a number of executive posts in the Music Section of Hungarian Radio, the Museum of Ethnography and the National Conservatoire. In 1947-48 he spent a year in London, composing music for the film of T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral. He was awarded the Kossuth Prize in 1951 for his ethnomusicological work. Nevertheless, he became increasingly isolated in the early fifties, which he called his Age of Anxiety. He was able to maintain contact with friends abroad only within the limis of a restricted correspondence.

In the early fifties he published much of the folk music he had collected. Népzenei monográfiák I-IV *(Ethnomusicological Studies I-IV), and his work as a composer extended to a 9th Symphony and a 10th String Quartet. His French colleagues expressed their solidarity and appreciation by electing him a Corresponding Member of the Académie des Beaux Arts. At the age of seventy he managed to travel to Western Europe once again. He died in February 1963, following his second heart attack.*

the stage, stressing that this is not a difference in standards, as there is no difference in the educational level of audiences at cinemas and theatres. The difference rather springs from the less active role of a movie-goer, which is also due to the film having much closer links with reality.

As for the screenplay, Eliot adds that, following the advice of the director, he had written an additional scene, as a prologue, telling the background of the plot. (Eliot in fact gave his voice to the character of the fourth Tempter.)

Hoellering writes about his main problem as director, and that was creating a balance between dialogue and images.

The publication does not deal with Lajtha's ideas as a composer. It simply mentions the composition and the name of the composer as well as of the performers, the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Adrian Boult, and the

Renaissance Singers conducted by Michael Howard.

Lajtha made a statement on his compositional concept during his stay in London. His article "Music and Films", appeared in *The Chesterian* in July 1948. It was written when he was about to complete his work, in June of the same year.[13] As far as I know, Lajtha never wrote elsewhere in such minute detail on his composing ideas in connection with any other of his works as he did about his film music. Such thoughts he usually left to his private correspondence, intending them mainly for friends and close acquaintances.

Though the music for *Murder in the Cathedral* was not his first commission for the cinema, it helped him formulate an essential conception.

Having always dissociated himself from box-office film music, Lajtha now pointed out repeatedly that he considered film music a modern kind of opera. Since opera as a genre was going through a critical period, its role could presumably be taken over by the sound film: "a new form of music drama or, rather, drama with music, is about to be born."[14]

For Lajtha such notions provided the approach to Eliot's play. As he put it, "Thus we get three artistic categories and their representatives: the 'film-choreographer', i.e. the producer, the poet or writer, and the musician... Thus a polyphony of the three arts arises: amazingly rich and complex possibilities may ensue. Events that have already taken place in the past, and those which are about to happen, or will happen in some future point of time, could be mixed in the most unexpected manner; if the audience does not quite understand the sequence at *that* particular point, his unconscious will readily assimilate all the effects of this artistic polyphony." [15]

The emphasis on the independent role of music is of great significance for Lajtha. Naturally this independence is valid in a harmonized context. He expressed his ideas virtually in theses, some of which I quote:

1. "We must not expect the music to express exactly the same things as the picture—or vice versa!"

2. "It is superfluous that the music should follow every little detail of the picture. Let us forget the so called 'dramatic background-music.'"

3. "...that film music worthy of its name must be good music independently of all outside circumstances, considerations and requirements. Which is only possible if the music could stand on its own feet, i.e. without the film.."

4. "If the music is to be independent, it must possess a certain form... I mention especially design and form, since the other elements are not endangered by the film."

5. "... this time-factor, that is the essential thing in musical form, and not those formulas and prescriptions used by second-rate, epigone composers, as a housepainter uses his patterns."

6. "The particular type of form to be adopted is of little importance; in this respect the composer has complete freedom."

7. "Let us not be afraid of silence. The composition of good pauses, good rests, is almost as difficult as that of notes."[16]

Lajtha also points out that the principles just mentioned cannot be of universal validity, as film and film music were a new form just in the process of genesis, and each film called for a different aproach.

The solution followed from Lajtha's composing principles. The primary and sole determinant in selecting the musical form was the time factor. Even in the first phase of his planning, Lajtha opted for the variation principle as the most suitable of classical formal principles.

In August 1947, when he started on the basic material, he already knew he would

compose an orchestral work of a theme with variations. His decision seems self-evident, partly because of the film falling into time units, and partly regarding the contentual differentiation and wealth of intonation springing from the variation principle. Variation construction just about offers flexible independence of formal articulation. It almost eliminates the need for outside "cuts", as the form itself provides the limits.

The orchestral piece, *11 Variations pour orchestre*, was the first formulation of the film music.[17] The poetic content of the subject was suggested by the mystical element of the drama: "Temptations". Regarding the musical material, the theme was his own notion. "It is simple but the construction contains much novelty," he wrote during the preparations.[18] The work of about 30 minutes duration called for a 67 strong orchestra. This backbone of the film music was the first to be completed, but the last variation still took up so much time that the work was only completed on April 16, 1948.[19] The composer considered it an orchestral work in its own right and this is how he also planned its performance. It was indeed first performed as an independent symphonic composition in London in the spring of 1948, under Sir Adrian Boult.

But the play called for further movements and musical ideas as well. At the climax, when Thomas Becket appeals to his judges, stating "I am innocent!", the music had to take on a new objective. Lajtha wrote a broadly phrased slow movement for this scene, an independent movement, which, when set apart from this dramatic function, became the slow movement in his Third Symphony, which drew inspiration from the film.

In a letter to the musicologist Bence Szabolcsi, Lajtha wrote about the origin of this orchestral work:

"I am working on the second orchestral composition for the film: a two movement 'Symphony'. (When the time comes, I will play it in the concert hall under this title.) The first is a long, 8 to 9 minute slow movement. The attribute 'long' in fact fits the clarinet melody which opens it... Then it has all kinds of things: much material from eight-part string polyphony to a Hungarian chorale. I am now working on the second movement, which will be an approximately 7 minute long, odd sort of fast movement."[20]

The score of the Third Symphony was ready in February 1948, and its first performance was planned for London in April.[21]

But the film led to yet another composition as well: a harp quintet, which Lajtha started to write in the second half of April and concluded during his stay in London, where it was performed at a concert. It was also performed in France and Hungary, as the Harp Quintet No.2, op. 46.

To the best of my knowledge, Lajtha's ideas on film-music and its results in yielding "absolute music" are unique. They spring from a dramatic prompting but have a life of their own. The origins as film music and orchestral and chamber music respectively do not show the usual duality of composing programme music and absolute music, just the opposite. Lajtha, when writing dramatic background music, was thinking in terms of absolute music: genre definitions of an orchestral work in variation form, a two-movement symphony, and a harp quintet. These provided the musical material for the film.

Instead of the usual musical approach prompted by images, he wrote self-contained works composed in terms of the time factor. He was convinced that independent musical movements attached to the play have a more complete and profound dramatic character than mere background music inspired by the images. He identified this independent musical origin as the birth of a new music drama. He felt sure that the new kind of music drama and the new opera developing simultaneously with it would cross-

fertilize each other. Indeed, he even arrived at a further conclusion in principle: "We are at the beginning of a road leading ultimately, however great the obstacles for us pioneers may be, to the new music drama."[22]

The Eliot film, made as "a polyphony of the three arts", carried off two prizes at the Venice Film Festival in 1951, but it has never been shown at any cinema in Hungary, except for a private screening to an invited audience at the British Embassy in 1968.

His collaboration with Eliot expanded Lajtha's aesthetic vision and fulfilled him as a composer, not as a composer of film music. He opted for the independent role of music: if music accompanies another art form in its own uncurtailed, autotelic self, then the art form concerned will also profit by this.

Working on the music for *Murder in the Cathedral* yielded three new compositions, the orchestral Variations (op.44), Symphony No.3, op. 45, and the Harp Quintet No. 2, which were linked by having been inspired by the play. Once aware of the recording as film music, the function of the three compositions in the film becomes clear. I know of no surviving score of the final version as it was performed for the film; indeed, I think the composer never set down on paper this final form of the film music. The recordings made of the live performances of the orchestral compositions must have served as the sound track and no score was specifically written for the film.

This is backed by a letter in which Lajtha expresses his pleasure concerning his working conditions: "I write the film music under conditions the like of which have hardly ever been provided to any musician. To start with, they do not only have me write the music but they also record it, and the images and the text are adjusted to the music from the start. Nothing binds me except time. And this, as music is something to be heard in time, is not an unfamiliar forming principle..."[23]

Murder in the Cathedral exemplifies a form of adjustment which benefits the independence of all the creators. That of the poet in a new, so far untried formal encounter, that of the director in the knowledge of the laws of balance between the play and the film, and that of the composer, with three independent works, gained through the inspiration of the play, and the recognition of an autotelic coexistence of play and music.

Conceptionally, the three compositions are less and less linked to the play. In the Third Symphony and the Second Harp Quintet the inspiration from the film played a background role only.

The year spent in London was a rich one as regards inspiration for Lajtha. The works he wrote after his London stay echo his London experiences profoundly and closely. His relationship to Vaughan Williams calls for further research. The influence of Eliot's play on Lajtha's plan for a comic opera and his urging Salvador de Madariaga to complete the libretto is obvious.[24]

The year spent in King Henry's Road was the only one wholly devoted to composition in Lajtha's life, for he was freed of all teaching and folksong collection duties. He lived the kind of life he liked: free, full of plans, working for his own benefit and that of "poor little Hungary".[25]

NOTES

1. Lajtha and Hoellering recalled their first work together on several occasions. For the most detailed account, see: Pál Geszti: "Vendégünk: Georg Hoellering" (Our Guest: Georg Hoellering), in *Filmkultúra*, 1967/6, pp. 42-44.
2. Hoellering's statement in London in Judit Köves: "Szívügye—a magyar film. Pályájáról és Lajtha Lászlóval való kapcsolatáról beszél Georges Hoellering" (The Hungarian film is his special cause. Georges Hoellering talks about his career and his relationship to László Lajtha), in *Film, Színház, Muzsika* (Film, Theatre, Music), 1968.
3. This account is largely based on a verbal communication by Mrs László Lajtha.
4. László Lajtha's letter to his wife and sons, dated London, 18 March 1947.
5. See Note 4.
6. László Lajtha's letter to his wife and sons, dated London, 29 March 1947.
7. See note 6.
8. See note 2.
9. See note 6.
10. It was particularly important to find a successor or a substitute for Lajtha in the Music Department of the Museum of Ethnography. On his recommendation, he was succeeded by Benjamin Rajeczky. See: Melinda Berlász: "Da capo al fine. Segélykiáltások a népzenekutatás létéért. (1946-1950)" (Da capo al fine. Calls for Help for the Survival of Folk Music Research. 1946-1950). See also: László Lajtha's letter to Bence Szabolcsi, London, April 17, 1948, in György Kroó: "Lajtha László arcképéhez" (A contribution to a Portrait of László Lajtha), op.cit., p. 57, and the letter dated August 23, op.cit. p. 47.
11. The starting date of composition given after the double line on the tracing paper copy of the score of 11 Variations pour orchestre sur un thème simple "les Tentations" opus 44 is August 1947.
12. *The Film of Murder in the Cathedral*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, no date, cca 1952. The copy owned by Lajtha is at present on show at the centenary Lajtha exhibition in the Museum of Ethnography.
13. László Lajtha: "Music and Films", in *The Chesterian*, 1948. No. 155,
14. Op.cit., and *The Chesterian*, 1948, No. 155, 2.
15. Op.cit., and *The Chesterian*, 1948, No. 155, 3 and 4.
16. The short quotations all come from Lajtha's article, "Music and Films". Here I give no separate page references, as the article is fairly short. (See note 13.)
17. Lajtha mentioned several different titles in his correspondence for the orchestral variations he wrote for the background music: the letter of January 17 1948 mentions it as *Theme with Variations*, on April 17, 1948 the title features as *Eleven Variations on a Simple Theme ("The Temptations")*, the manuscript score uses a French version of the title, and the latest list of his works simply prints *Variations*. All these titles refer to op. 44.
18. Quoted from László Lajtha's letter to Bence Szabolcsi, January 17, 1948. Op.cit. p. 51.
29. According to the date of *Variations*, and also coinciding with the letters Lajtha wrote to Bence Szabolcsi from London, op.cit. See note ll.
20. Lajtha's letter to Bence Szabolcsi on January 17, 1948, London. Op.cit. p. 51.
21. Lajtha's letter to Bence Szabolcsi of February 18, 1948, London. Op.cit. p. 53.
22. Op.cit. and *The Chesterian*, 5.
23. Lajtha's letter to Bence Szabolcsi, op.cit. p. 51.
24. The influence of English composition on Lajtha calls for a separate study. The same holds true for his creative encounter with Vaughan Williams. His plan for a comic opera and the completion of the libretto for it, all inspired by London experiences, are of equal importance.
25. During the months Lajtha spent in London he did much to establish relations between British and Hungarian music. He urged transmissions of BBC broadcasts in Budapest, and paved the way for the International Folk Dance Congress to be held in Budapest in 1949. Most of his endeavours met with no response, as they received no adequate support in Hungary. See his letters to Bence Szabolcsi from 1948. Op.cit. p. 54.

Playing Schoenberg to Schoenberg

Jenő Lehner of the Kolisch String Quartet remembers

Jenő Lehner, who was born in Pozsony (Pressburg/Bratislava) in 1906, played the viola in the legendary Kolisch Quartet until 1939. He then became principal viola player of the Boston Symphony at the personal request of Koussevitsky. Retired, after nearly forty years of orchestral work, he now lives in Boston, and is still active as one of the most respected quartet and chamber music master teachers in the United States.

In September 1991 he held a master class in Rotterdam and there gave this interview.

My father was an amateur pianist and regularly played trios with friends at our Pozsony home. When I was four, after much pleading, I was given a small violin for Christmas. As the family remembers, I played Schumann's *Träumerei* on it that very evening. Naturally they were delighted.

In my first year at school, the teacher noticed that I could carry a tune. When it turned out that I could also play the violin a bit, he invited me to his home and taught me to read a score. A new world opened up for me, because until then I had played everything by ear. Turbulent war years followed, during which I had no violin teacher.

I must have been eleven or twelve when I first met Bartók. He had been asked to participate in a charity concert at which I, as a budding talent, would play with him. Taking no heed of my parents' opposition, I played the Brahms A major Sonata. I thought this would be a fine opportunity to become familiar with the piano part as well, it being too difficult for my father. Without any rehearsal, we stepped up on stage and played. Afterwards, they treated me like any little boy in such a situation, I was hugged, kissed, and patted on the shoulder. Bartók, though, pulled me aside and quietly said, "Jenő, high time you learned to play the violin!"

When the chaos after the war had slackened a bit, I found myself in Budapest, and was accepted at the Academy of Music as the pupil of Gyula Mambriny. My second meeting with Bartók took place at this time. My teacher had assigned me Lipinsky's *Concerto Militaire,* which I found so monstrously awful that I was unwilling to work on it. I was a mulish fifteen-year-old, and simply did not attend my violin lessons. One day, the college porter stopped me: "You're Jenő Lehner, aren't you? Professor Bartók wants to see you!" I realized immediately what it was all about and had made up a marvellous little story by the time I arrived at his office.

I knocked; the door opened, and Bartók was standing there. He looked at me. "Professor Mambriny says you have not been attending your lessons. Why is this?" Now anyone who ever looked into Bartók's eyes knows that it was impossible to lie to him. My alibi evaporated, and I could barely answer, that "I was assigned the L-L-Lipinsky concerto, and I

Ákos Pásztor *teaches the cello at the Bartók Conservatory in Budapest.*

don't want to st-st-study it because it's so awful."

"If Professor Mambriny assigned you that piece, there must surely be a reason. Go home, learn the piece, and don't let me hear any more that you're not attending your lessons." He saved my life, because competition was so fierce that they soon expelled anyone who did not turn up at lectures.

Not long after this, I joined Hubay's class. The Maestro would come in, say, at two o'clock, sit down at the piano, and one of those waiting in the room had to play. Everyone was terribly nervous and frightened of course, he was held in such regard; we considered him a sort of god. But Hubay was such an astonishingly engaging teacher that a shy mouse, after half an hour of playing, walked away a raging lion. I don't know how he did it. He would sit down at the piano—he played with virtuosity, fire, and great feeling—and in playing the opening of a piece would give the students fabulous self-confidence.

The other maestro who inspired exceptional regard was Kodály, with whom I studied composition. He had an astonishing memory. Writing various short pieces was our homework. In examining it, he would make a remark such as "this is almost identical with the secondary theme from the third movement of X's symphony"—and X was always a little-known or completely unknown composer. Of course we were convinced he was bluffing. After a few such comments, our curiosity took us to the library to check. He was always perfectly accurate.

Just before my final recital at the Music Academy in Budapest, I got a letter from Sándor Jemnitz, the composer and music critic, who had shorly before written quite a favourable review of one of my concerts. I expected that he might ask me to play one of his viola pieces, but I was wrong. He explained that I should help out some of his Viennese friends, a string quartet whose viola player had simply disappered. I took my viola under my arm and left for Vienna that very day, spending all the next day playing quartets. Afterward they asked me to stay with them. Fine, I responded, but I must arrange to put off my exams in Budapest. I never returned to the Academy again. In the meantime, I have been a professor at and received honorary doctorates from many universities, though I never received my diploma.

So that is how, in 1925, I became the viola player of the Kolisch Quartet. The Berg Lyric Suite was on the first programme we played, at the Baden-Baden Festival, and then we played the quartet of Schoenberg's student Mosolov in Berlin and at the Frankfurt Festival. We rehearsed night and day. The Lyric Suite was such a success that our manager booked the entire subsequent season for us within a couple of days. We retired to a small Austrian village to work up the repertoire.

I had been a member of the Kolisch Quartet for only a few months when Schoenberg arrived with the manuscript of his Third Quartet. After we played it through, I thought to myself that this is not music. But a few months later, when we began to work on the piece—again in an Austrian village—, I came to love the piece so deeply that I was unable to take other kinds of music seriously for a long time.

It was Schoenberg's idea to perform without a score. On his birthday in 1927, we gave a performance of the new Third Quartet for his friends and students. Our spirits after dinner were buoyant, thanks to some drink, and Schoenberg asked us to play some more. We regretted not having brought our scores along. "Ah, what kind of musicians are you, who can't play without a score!" It occurred to us that we usually began our rehearsal sessions with quartet études that we could play without music. We would practice

the tuning section from the coda of the F sharp minor quartet and various bowings from the finale of the Third Razumovsky. He was very excited after we played these. "Now that's real quartet playing. You should always play like that." We were infected by his enthusiasm, and decided to memorize all the Razumovskys, and soon found an occasion to perform them. The next concert was to be at the Bauhaus in Dessau; on the programme were Schoenberg's Third Quartet, the Lyric Suite, and, after an intermission, the Third Razumovsky. Of course, we played the Schoenberg and the Berg from the score. During the intermission we removed the music stands and then set about the Beethoven. I must confess that I became capable of such a bouncing staccato for the first—and last—time in my life.

During the slow introduction the bow was fairly quivering in my hand. As we played, we came to enjoy it more and more, and saw that Schoenberg was right, as usual. Piece by piece we learned our repertoire by heart. Fortunately, travel was a rather lengthy business at the time. What is now a six-hour intercontinental flight took six days then; in those days, we spent about six hundred hours per season travelling. It was a tremendous amount of time. We played bridge, chess, we read, ate, slept, and still had hundreds of hours to work on the music.

People always made a big to-do of performance from memory, but I feel it's rather a matter of the state of one's nerves rather than of the memory. I don't think there is a professional quartet these days that doesn't know its repertoire by heart, but many players get nervous if there's no score before them, and that's what really causes the problems. Of the, say, hundred and fifty concerts in a season, I would not have wanted to play from the score in a hundred and thirty of them. It would have been deadly boring. There would be about ten before which I sensed that there might be trouble, and another ten where I would have given anything for a look at the score. I don't know about my colleagues, but that's how I felt.

For the first three or four years there were no summer concerts. At the end of the season we would decide where we would work on the new repertory that summer. It was our custom that everyone would have learnt their parts by heart by the first meeting. We got involved in some exceptionally demanding work in the Verein für Musikalische Privataufführungen, founded by Schoenberg in 1918. When I joined the Vienna Quartet (the Kolisch's original name), they had already learned and performed the Webern Bagatelles, the Five Pieces, Schoenberg's First and Third Quartets, Berg's op.3 pieces, and works by members of Schoenberg's circle as well as by other contemporary composers. We studied every piece with either Steuermann, Stein, Webern, or Schoenberg, and each piece had its *Vortragsmeister*, who was responsible for the artistic quality of both the rehearsals and the concerts.

Webern was perhaps the most sensitive, precise, and indefatigable of them. I remember that when we were studying the String Trio, which we first performed in Siena, his rehearsals were quite special. He could explain and illustrate a rest marking for twenty minutes. "Put a tiny caesura before this rest... then a little accelerando..., then take a breath for a short fermata. ..., then there should be a half beat at the end of the rest..." If I were to explain things in this way to an unsuspecting student, he would think I was joking, yet this was anything but a joke. The fever of barely-suppressed tension burned in his animated face, and his demands for precision and accuracy were astounding. Of today's musicians, Boulez can perhaps be compared to him.

Berg was altogether different, more tranquil, forgiving, and patient. If something came together or sounded nice, he was content and genuinely pleased. He

was a *grand seigneur,* an Epicurean, who enjoyed life. One Saturday there was a big game of football on at the time of our rehearsal. He insisted that we not miss it, and we packed ourselves into a car and headed for the stadium.

For Schoenberg, the most important thing was clarity. He firmly believed that a performance had to be clear enough, transparent enough to allow the listener to write out the score afterwards. (As if we were all little Mozarts). For him, each beat brought new ideas, questions, and solutions. He was full of goodwill, warmth, and had a sense of humour, though his most notable trait was his curiosity; he was thirst for knowledge incarnate, with interests of unbounded scope and energy. Anything that came into his purview was immediately organized, explained, and perfected by his hyperactive mind. This was true for our work with him as well. As soon as he heard that we were to play a complete Beethoven cycle the following season in New York, of course we had to play in Los Angeles as well, where he gave particularly engaging lectures on those works. I cannot imagine how he acquired his enormous musical knowledge because he was extraordinarily busy his whole life. But who can say how a genius operates?

Thus, we once rehearsed his Fourth Quartet with him. Pencil in hand, he interrupted us countless times to ask about our aproaches and conceptions. With time, there would be less and less pencil-tapping, fewer stops, until finally we played an entire movement without interruption. There was a long pause, and then he spoke, "Tell me, do you understand this music? Do you like it? Why don't you play Mozart?" He studied us intensely, then lost interest. It is only now that I understand why: when he was inspired, he composed extremely quickly; without inspiration he simply could not write. When he finally (thank God!) finished the score and sent a copy to Mrs Coolidge, he gladly put it out of his mind. Months passed, and it became clear that he had forgotten what he had written. The inspired fever of composition had passed and he no longer knew why he wrote what he did. During our rehearsal, he was probably asking himself why he wrote certain things, and what they could possibly mean. He worked himself ever more into this impasse, a process which our imperfect playing probably accelerated. I think new dimensions of his works opened up for him then.

Many big-wigs were present at the first performance of the piece in Los Angeles in January of 1937: Klemperer, the composer Ernst Toch, and many others. In discussing the piece, they found there were some points they could not clear up among them, and so turned to Schoenberg with their questions. He responded that he had no answers for them, that he composed like Mozart, one idea after the other. *"Eine Idee folgt der andern."* The strange thing was that whenever he completed a piece, he would tell his friends that he had finally discovered his voice, and that he would no longer have any problems in that area. But later, when confronted with one of his earlier works, he would always discover something unexpected and surprising, for which he could never give an explanation.

In 1937 or 1938, I spent almost every evening at Schoenberg's Brentwood home as a member of the Kolisch Quartet. On one occasion, I arrived earlier than the others to come upon Schoenberg working in his study, its door wide open as always, because he couldn't bear for anything to happen in the house without his knowledge. The rehearsals took place in the adjoining living room. He asked me to sit down while he finished something. He was sitting at a table he had designed himself, writing with amazing speed, arousing my curiosity. He couldn't be composing this fast, I thought, perhaps he is working on an instrumentation

or simply copying something. My curiosity got the better of my manners, and when he stopped to turn a page, I asked him, "Excuse me, maestro, is that an instrumentation?" "No, no, I'm writing an organ piece that I must complete by tomorrow."

Trudy Schoenberg told me that she often—usually at the eleventh hour—locked him into the bedroom with food and music paper, otherwise he would never finish a commissioned work on time. Unlike Berg and Webern, he worked very fast, compelled to compose as quickly as Mozart, otherwise he could never have composed a forty-minute piece like the First Quartet in only three weeks. It was only putting the music on paper that meant real physical work for him.

In retrospect, I am astonished how different these three composers were, a perfect reflection of their respective works as we see them today. I think the only real significance of the concept of the "Second Viennese School" is that Berg and Webern were unanimous in their understanding of, and their respect and love for, Schoenberg and that they shared a similar uncompromising aesthetic, artistic and moral faith. They were a true Holy Trinity: Schoenberg, the beloved, almighty, greatly respected Father; Berg, the humble and generous Son, merciful Saviour, and indefatigable fighter for noble goals; and Webern, the Holy Ghost, pure spirit, almost incorporeal, the saint and martyr.

The works of Mozart, Beethoven, or Brahms are often performed badly, even outrageously, but they cannot be destroyed. In contrast, if Schoenberg is played only 99 per cent well, the music is dead. Unfortunately we were also capable of not a few inadequate performances. Though we did all we could to achieve a good performance, we simply did not always understand the music to its depths. We did just what the following generations did: we played everything literally. Though we conscientiously took into consideration every component of the score, sometimes—I see now—we did not see the wood for the trees.

Such situations called for compromise. Before the first performance of the Fourth Quartet, a film composer and student of Schoenberg's at the time suggested that we record the Quartets, promising to arrange a studio for us. It turned out that he arranged for us to record in an enormous film studio and the man who handled the sole microphone had had no experience with the recording of music. We were given two mornings to record the four pieces, with no time for multiple takes, let alone problems of balance. We called the whole thing a learning experience and tried to forget about it.

Later they wanted to distribute the recording commercially. Schoenberg asked our permission individually in a letter, since the quartet had disbanded by then. Naively, I suggested that, since I considered the recording to be of poor quality, the quartet might come together over the summer to re-record the works. I offered all of my free time for the project, believing that a truly fine recording was possible. Schoenberg responded quite angrily that it was up to him to decide. He emphatically asked me to agree to the issue since his works were performed so rarely. I said yes, but this was unfortunate, since I heard the recording some thirty years later, and it is unacceptable in almost every respect. I only regret that many consider it to be authentic because the composer took an active part in its preparation.

The Schoenberg quartets have been recorded many times since. The Juilliard and La Salle Quartets play them with a near-perfect precision, yet I feel today—and to my taste this is the most important thing—that the human element is missing from these recordings. There is no musician that I esteem more than Robert Mann. He is my dearest and closest friend, and his musicianship is in my opinion the last word, yet our feelings about Schoen-

berg's works are often quite different. The freedom of the performance, so important for any music, be it Schubert, Mozart, or anyone else, is particularly crucial for these works. This is because tonal music provides the performer and listener with milestones through the workings of its harmonies, helping them to establish their bearings. Twelve-tone music uses other devices to guide the listener: every single phrase and gesture is an emphatic conveyor of meaning. I feel that what is most often lacking toward a full-bodied interpretation of these pieces are bravery and imagination, which convey the human factor. For example, the third movement of the Third Quartet is a little street tune, practically a popular hit tune. But if it is played "precisely" as it is written in the score—which of course no musician would ever do with the works of Beethoven or other composers—the content of the tune is lost completely. A truly marvellous performance, like the one I heard from the Schoenberg Quartet here in Rotterdam, is a rarity. They played the Second Quartet; I leaned back in my seat, and felt from the first note to the last that I had nothing to add to the performance.

Music is made up of three fundamental elements: song, dance, and speech. I sometimes feel that speech is the most important—and by "speech" I really mean "timing." It is often my experience, in listening to performances of eighteenth and nineteenth-century music, that the quick, short notes are treated as time fillers between "beautiful" sections.

It is also vital to give the music a sense of direction. A good performance must give the impression that it does not end where it began, but must create the impression of distance, the natural dimension of musical space. Mechanical repetition cannot span such a space. These are all issues that cannot be written into the score.

This is the century of excessive vibrato. Its use or absence always depends on musical events. I often feel that its possibilities are restricted by the practice of accelerating the vibrato to "warm up" the sound. This is indeed the result, but the practice is unacceptable as a rule. Another fundamental and recurring problem is the manner and length of bowing. Fortunately for wind players, they do not have to face this problem. How does one deal, for example, with a crescendo? If every note is played with an equally long bowing, of course something will be missing, but if ever slightly longer bowings are used from note to note, both the crescendo and a sense of direction will be achieved. Generally, most players use much more bow than is necessary, without variation. The bow is not a freight train, it is not required to get from the point of departure to its destination; it is not even a highway where the direction of travel is determined.

The western tradition of musical notation can convey the intentions of the composer only within narrow limits; sometimes the composers experiment in extending these limits. The pianist Arthur Schnabel was an exceptionally original avant-garde composer, who added an explanatory text to nearly every note of the score of his String Quartet. But these were not much help to us, since we understood almost nothing of the piece. But everything became clear when he played the piece at the piano and sang it. The scores of the second Viennese school are in a similar situation: they are generally overburdened with notations, which in my experience cannot bring about a true rendition of the work even in their most faithful and conscientious use.

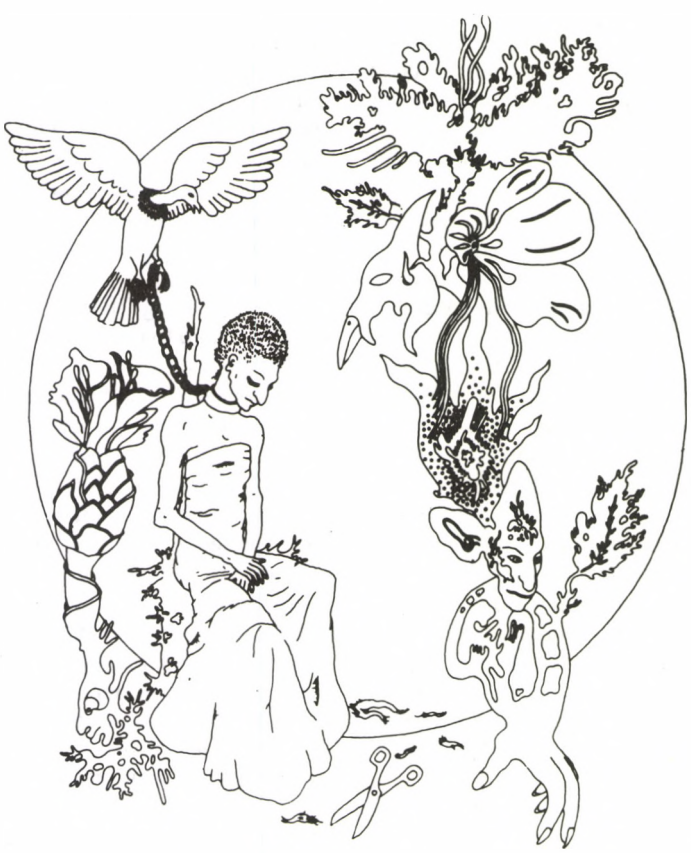
I never hesitate to add that my opinion about the works is completely subjective. I consider it important that no one play anything that runs counter to his convictions. If an idea or suggestion is convincing, then one may try it out. Ever-new windows should be opened up; I do not believe that teaching consists of imita-

tion, primarily because it is nuclear whether we will feel and think the same way next week as we do today.

Speech and language are also music. Let me give an interesting, perhaps unusual and surprising example: I was hardly able to read anything of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. It is not made up of words, but of invented sounds in place of words. *Ulysses* is a work of words, though they appear in unusual combinations. I first made this discovery when I chanced on the German translation of *Ulysses*. I just did not understand Mrs Bloom's stream-of-consciousness thoughts at the end of the work when I read them in English, but through the German, I felt where the place of the punctuation marks was. Free association makes it impossible to structure or understand this text "normally" or grammatically; this is what makes it an unmediated mirror of internal psychic processes.

Music for me works in a similar way. Nowadays unfortunately the object of composition is not the "message," the musical thought, but has become sound itself. I first confronted this problem in working with a quartet on a Morton Feldman piece. There was a section that I did not understand, so I visited Feldman and asked for help. He looked at me as if I were some sort of Martian. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said, "I invented this sound; that's the whole point."

Ákos Pásztor



Tamás Koltai

A Lean and Hungry Theatre?

Strategies for Survival

Two years ago the question was whether theatres in Hungary would survive at all. A structure built on state subsidy was threatened with collapse. During the 1990 elections it was clear that the new government would cut funds for the theatre and the arts in general. It was uncertain to what extent local authorities would be willing and able to make up the shortfall. While the budget was making its way through parliament, and in a period before the new local government network was set up, a system called normative subsidy was operated. This system, ironically referred to as the "poll quota", set a theatre subsidy by a simple calculation based on the number of seats. The disadvantage of such calculations for theatres in provincial towns and small theatres in the capital are clear to see: for the former because of the smaller size of their potential audiences, and for the latter because production expenses do not decrease in proportion to the number of seats in the auditorium.

Eventually the theatre federation managed to have normative support applied in a non-mechanical manner. During the transitional period, subsidies, though lower than previously, were distributed proportionately and thus the theatres were able to continue functioning. In the meantime, local authorities have also come to recognize their duty toward the arts. Arrangements have been made everywhere on the proportion of central and local subsidies, and no theatre has had to close its doors.

All this does not mean that the position of professional theatres has been settled once and for all. Every theatre has had to add to its subsidy which is declining in value, partly by increasing ticket prices, partly by searching for sponsors, and partly by going in for independent enterprise.

A drastic rise in ticket prices has become general in the past two years. Even the Katona József Theatre in Budapest, which draws on a young audience, has been unable to keep to its intention of holding prices at an artificially low level. All the same, you can still get into the Katona József for eighty forints (approximately one dollar), while seat prices for some musicals in other theatres are four or five times as much. (As a ground for comparison: the subsistence level is now set at 10,000 forints a month, almost twice as high as two years ago.)

Since the pockets of the theatre-going public are not bottomless, the theatres themselves are bound to seek out other sources of income. There is a growing number of companies and, especially, banks sponsoring various productions. However, in the absence of legislation providing tax exemption for sponsorship,

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the number concerned is still fairly small. Some of the theatres are going into various business undertakings. The noted playwright and novelist György Spiró, appointed as manager of the Szigligeti Theatre of Szolnok in March 1992, for example, is planning to exploit a new television studio next to the theatre building so as to provide a steady income out of the TV programmes that are to be made there.

So far no solid capital has come forward to set up a private theatre. A first timorous step has been taken by someone who has leased — for a nominal sum — from the local government in Kecskemét (a city 80 kilometres south of Budapest) the chamber theatre of the city's repertory company: with a view to staging productions there. His first move was to ask for (and to receive) money from the Theatre Fund set up by the Ministry of Culture, which provides additional funding to alternative enterprises and undertakings initiated by state-run theatres. (A similar fund is financed by the Budapest Municipal Authorities as well.)

There have been people from abroad who tried to buy or lease centrally situated, long-established large theatres such as the Vígszínház and the Madách in Budapest: the aim being to stage Broadway-type musicals on a regular and strictly commercial basis — with casts engaged for each production and productions running only for as long as they can bring in an audience. The managements of the theatres concerned have resisted the temptation and for the time being have also persuaded the municipal authorities to share their position. They argue for the tried advantages of a permanent company, an argument justifiable in theory though not always in practice. It cannot be argued that a permanent company ensures both financial security and high standards. There remains the question, however, whether every company constantly satisfies standards and, should this not be the case, whether it is in the interest of the arts to provide financial protection for the company concerned? The question is also justified inasmuch as the financial resources of local government are continuously being stretched—as they themselves have pointed out—and they would not object to being able to free themselves of a commitment to some of the theatres for the above reason. The Budapest Metropolitan Authorities, for instance, are seriously considering a proposal to have one of the streets in the capital, Nagymező utca, and its surroundings, where several, mainly musical theatres are located, redeveloped with foreign capital. This would involve the theatres here getting into foreign ownership and the construction of a leisure complex, complete with restaurants, night clubs, operetta theatres, and music halls. The theatre world is still largely against this "Budapest Broadway." If they fear this kind of Americanization, they are right insofar as the conditions for it (professional orchestras and corps de ballet, singing stars, etc.) are simply lacking. On the other hand, considering the questionable standards of musical productions at present, their protest does not carry much weight. Even less so if the protesters are unaware of the fact that in the long run a 60-70 per cent subsidy will hardly be paid to the type of musical theatre which abroad, under the market conditions yearned for in Hungary too, actually makes money.

Real theatre-goers, of course, are not hoping for market conditions and American musicals. They would much rather see at least one serious theatre on Budapest's Broadway as well. The area can offer an adequate, well equipped home for it, and there is certainly interest. A particular paradox of the situation is that the most suitable man to take this in hand, for reasons known only to him, is simply not interested in theatre at the moment. Gábor Székely ran what was, after the Kaposvár company, the best theatre company in the country during the 1970s in

Szolnok. In 1978, he was appointed artistic director of the Budapest National, where he incurred the wrath of the Communist Party. In removing him from the post, the party reached a compromise and allowed him to found, together with Gábor Zsámbéki, an independent company—the Katona József Theatre in Budapest. By the time the company had achieved international repute, Székely resigned from its management. His final production was Molière's *Le Misanthrope*, in November 1988. Since then he has been teaching at the Academy of Dramatic Art, taking a lion's share of the leadership of the Theatre Federation, and staging the occasional play abroad. In May 1992 the company tri-bühne of Stuttgart staged Mrozek's *Exiles* and István Örkény's *The Tóth Family* under his direction for their visit to Budapest—performances that must be ranked among the very best of the season. Székely's merits as a director and theatre manager are exceptional: in a certain sense it can be taken as symptomatic that he is unable to find partners—principally directors—to organize a company. His loss to the theatre can be felt more and more as a challenge. It would be a grave mistake to let him turn into a legend instead of a man of the theatre who is engaged in its day to day work.

The new situation, created by the past two years, has ripened a few modest undertakings. The 1991-92 season has seen the launching of three fairly significant enterprises, with some degree of support coming from financial circles, banks and institutions. Two of them have survived to the end of the season—the Komédium, lead by István Verebes, and the Merlin, which was taken over by Tamás Jordán during the season. Komédium is a decent basement theatre in the commercial heart of Budapest, without a company of its own. After a promising start with Slavomir Mrozek's two-handed *Striptease* (produced by János Taub), it slowly ran out of wind and by the end of the season showed definite signs of breathlessness. The Merlin, (in the courtyard of a group of buildings housing Budapest's Metropolitan Authorities, which provide support for it as well), is trying to become a kind of meeting place for intellectuals by its staging of plays by Shelagh Delaney and Beckett, by giving performances in English, hosting foreign companies, and literary and musical programmes. It is trying to act as a modern National Theatre in miniature, while the real National is living through a continuous crisis.

The Independent Stage (under József Ruszt), was originally part of the National Theatre at Szeged and now exists in the "empty space" of a suburban house in Budapest. A professional company, it is, in an intellectual sense, an alternative theatre. The most effective of the alternatives is the Arvisura Company (under István Somogyi), based on the Szkéné Stage of the Budapest Technical University, whose latest production was a noteworthy version of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margaritha.*

Although the Hungarian theatre has been in labour, the last two seasons have produced no real masterpieces. The major productions have avoided direct politicking and abstract aesthetics, they aim at a purity of shaping and conception at a time when public thought and culture are being poisoned by cheap emotions.

Büchner's *Leonce and Lena* (in the Budapest Chamber Theatre, January 1991, directed by Enikő Eszenyi) was created in the tiny studio theatre as an existential play close to the absurd, and marked this young actress's debut as a director.

Somewhere in Russia (in the Csiky Gergely Theatre at Kaposvár, February 1991, directed by András Jeles) begins with Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, but after two acts drowns Chekhov in a Gulag oratorio, a camp rite with masks resembling the skulls of Eskimo children found in mass graves.

Slomo An-Ski's classical *Dybuk* (Independent Stage, October 1991, directed by József Ruszt) re-established oral tale, lyricism and poetry with a sparse production in an empty space, relying entirely on transfiguring performances.

Thomas Bernhard's monologue with several characters, *The Theatre Maker* (Budapest Chamber Theatre, November 1991, directed by Tamás Tolmár) was turned into a grotesque apotheosis of the theatre through a masterful performance by László Sinkó.

Péter Halász left Hungary in 1975 and made a name for himself in America with companies called the Squat and the Love Theatre. In February 1992 he directed *The Chinaman*, in the new studio theatre of the Katona József Theatre. The play is about the way the Katona József performs the story of a theatrical company which is about to stage Bartók's ballet, *The Miraculous Mandarin,* under a Hungarian director, in New York. All this is done with charm and grace on a stage of about one square metre, where the actors can never be seen at their full height.

Finally two productions by Tamás Ascher: *Le Misanthrope* at Kaposvár (November 1991) and Géza Bereményi's adaptation of Heinrich Böll's novel *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum* in The Chamber (May 1992). Both are about the catch-22 in which one has to live in a permanent crisis of values—as we all do in Hungary now.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sir, I see that in his amusingly shameless puff for his Budapest guide (*NHQ* 125, page 110) your contributor András Török conflates the titles of two famous Borges short stories—"The Babylonian Lottery" and "The Library of Babel"—into "The Library of Babylon". It is reassuring to find that even guide-book writers sometimes have trouble with place-names. The fact that these "confusibles" begin with a "B" prompts reflection on the oft-repeated but rarely-documented Western media canard involving your capital. Or is there, at this very moment, some hapless tourist clutching Mr Török's estimable work as he desperately seeks the "alternative" Bucharest?

With every good wish to you and your revivified journal,

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Brezhnew, on the other hand, was an indiscriminate kisser. Well and fine that he tried to lure Dubcek back into the family in 1968 with his kisses (only to find foot treading to be more effective). But there can be no excuse for his kissing the unsuspecting Jimmy Carter full on the lips at the Vienna signing of the First SALT Agreement. This gauche violation of his private space very likely came as more of a shock to the American President than the invasion of Afghanistan. In Auden's words, "Some thirty inches from my nose / The frontier of my Person goes".

From: "Comradely Kisses. A Cogitation," by Ákos Szilágyi, p. 13.